

DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN

Victoria Cross

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DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HILDA AGAINST THE WORLD

THE NIGHT OF TEMPTATION

THE LIFE SENTENCE

A GIRL OF THE KLONDYKE

SIX WOMEN

SIX CHAPTERS OF A MAN'S LIFE

TO-MORROW?



Just as the sun was losing its fierceness, they started.

DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN

BY

VICTORIA CROSS, *pseud.*

[Cory, Vivian]

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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DEDICATED
TO
MY BELOVED AND ADORED
MOTHER

THE INSPIRER OF ALL MY WORK, WHOSE SPIRIT
LIVES EVER IN MY SOUL, AND WHO, BY REASON
OF HER GLORIOUS BEAUTY, DIVINE GIFTS, AND
THE WONDERFUL GREATNESS OF HER CHARACTER,
WAS HERSELF MOST TRULY A DAUGHTER OF HEAVEN

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Sons and Daughters of Heaven,
What is your heritage here?
Pain and sorrow and sighing,
Weeping and toil and care.

Sons and Daughters of Heaven,
What is your guerdon above?
Triumph, fulfilment, rejoicing,
Peace and infinite love.

Would you exchange for earth's playthings
Visions your eyes have seen?
Would you lose the amaranth flowers
For coins of golden sheen?

Wealth and Pleasure and Power,
And all that this world can give
Are nothing to you, O children,
Whom God has taught how to live.

Your eyes with truth are shining,
Your feet with light are shod;
Your thoughts are fixed on Heaven,
Your spirit dwells with God.

What is to you the darkness,
The travail of the way?
You walk with steps unfaltering
Towards Eternal Day.

VICTORIA CROSS.

DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN

DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN

THE BACHELOR

YES: he was a bachelor and he had never wished to be anything else till he went for his holidays one year to the Yellowstone Park, one of the most mysteriously beautiful places in the world. He stayed at the Fountain Hotel, and opposite him at the narrow dining-table sat the girl who was to change his views. She was small and fair, with fluffy sunny hair and blue eyes, and seemed overshadowed by a somewhat grim-looking aunt who sat beside her. He soon found out they were English, travelling for pleasure, and, with true American dash, not only obtained an introduction but had won over the aunt on the second day of his stay. On the third he had persuaded them to a moonlight stroll round the paint pots, or mud geysers, and looking at the girl's

delicate face in the silver light, felt his heart beat in the real romantic way. She seemed so ethereal, so dainty, so refined! she appealed to him, perhaps because she was something so different from himself. He was a great big, strong fellow—a typical American, straight and tall, with a good figure and fine features, all of which the blue eyes saw with pleasure, and so they smiled prettily on him whenever he looked at her. He had a large heart, full of friendliness, and a hand always ready to help the weak or injured or oppressed. He had sentiment, too, though in New York his was counted amongst the hardest heads, sentiment that made him feel attracted towards all that was fragile and delicate. He would watch the white butterflies that floated in at his office window in the spring with kindly eyes, and their confidence was never abused.

The aunt liked him, as did everyone else, and generally spoke of him to her niece as “that lively American.” The niece liked him even better than the aunt did, and generally thought of him as “that handsome American.”

They went for numerous walks together, the girl and the man alone, without any chaperon, as the sensible American custom allows. The aunt did not want to walk the long distances, and after suitable remonstrance gave in to her persuasive niece.

“You couldn’t do it in England, Eva,” the elder lady remarked.

“No, but Neil Johns is an American, he’ll understand it, and it will be all right,” replied the younger, and won her point and enjoyed her walks, in which both she and the American learnt something of each other and liked what they learnt, and incidentally saw much of the mystic charm of the park, one of the brightest jewels in America’s crown of beauty.

Two weeks slipped by pleasantly while they visited the different pools—wonderful magic pools of emerald, of deep cobalt, of lightest sapphire—and listened awestruck to the mutterings and groanings, the stifled threats and moans of the waters imprisoned beneath their feet—two weeks of August weather, sunny and beautiful, and yet with occasional skifts of

snow, for at eight thousand feet up it is never too hot, even in August, and with frosty mornings when the hoofs of the deer rang sharply on the hard glittering roads.

One day about the middle of the month there was excitement in the hotel. The fountain geyser, the finest in the park, was announced to be going to play at midnight that night, and a brake or coach would be ready to take any of the guests who wished to see it to the pool, about a mile and a half from the hotel. Only at intervals of many years did this particular geyser rise in its glory, and no absolutely certain date could ever be fixed for it, as it was the most capricious in the Yellowstone. None of the guests then in the hotel had ever seen it play, though many were on their third or fourth yearly visit to the park. Calculations had been made of the time since the last display, and it was thought without doubt the time had come round again.

So the idea of the visit to it by night was enthusiastically welcomed, a supper was served at eleven, and a little before midnight the

coach came round and was filled to overflowing with tourists of all nationalities. A merry, rollicking crowd they were, laughing and shouting and jesting good-humouredly in the scramble for places. A few minutes more and they were off at a canter down the white road.

It was a glorious night; the moon filled the sky with radiance, and threw its soft light over the weird, enchanting landscape, over the turfy grass at the side of the road, over the gleaming white areas of the formations, the natural plateau or border round each boiling spring, formed by the overflowing of its lime and sulphur charged waters, over the glistening, boiling lakes, and shone in pale rainbows on the veils of steam that hung above them. All round, far off on the horizon, where the land rose against the sky like the edges of a bowl, stood a belt of fir trees, black and impressive in the moonlight.

Neil and Eva sat in the back of the coach close together, and felt happy.

When they arrived near the geyser, the coach swept off the high-road over a green

grassy trail among the trees, and then drew up on the outer edge of the clearing—a wide, circular space five hundred yards across—which was the home of the fountain geyser. Green, mossy grass bordered the circle, then came the court of the formation, its smooth limey surface gleaming white in the moonlight, with little boiling streams wandering here and there on it, and in the centre, the pool of the geyser itself, black as ink, boiling, throwing its hot breath in curls of steam upon the air.

The more noisy of the tourists gave a shout of delight as they saw it, and, scrambling down from the coach, dispersed chattering and laughing over the formation. Neil helped his companion down, and they walked together to the rim of the pool. Though inactive at present, a practised eye could see that an eruption was at hand. The agitated waters seethed bubbling to the brink, where they lapped over steaming, sending rivulets in all directions over the flat court. The pool was unusually full and the surface heaved with a continual swaying movement.

The man and girl stood staring down into the troubled depths for a few moments in silence. Then the girl looked up and round, at the stately trees on the edge of the forest which loomed black and impenetrable round them, at the turfy margin where the other tourists already satisfied with their inspection had grouped themselves together to await the "burst up," as they familiarly called it, at the clear sky, ablaze with stars, stretching over all.

"We might make those folks a fire, they look pretty cold," remarked the American reflectively. "There's lots of wood about," and as the girl readily assented, they went off to gather up the old sticks which, as always in these mountain forests, lay strewn in all directions, bleached and dry, looking in the moonlight like the old and whitened bones of skeletons, and adding to the weird ferocity of the scene.

His idea was soon taken up, and while the women had shawls and rugs spread out for them and were told to sit still and watch for events, the men all started after wood in every

direction. A quarter of an hour later a roaring camp-fire blazed merrily, throwing a rich, red light over the marble-like floor of the formation and ruby-like reflections on to the steaming flats of water that stretched out now stealthily even to the edge of the turf. They sat round the fire and told stories and sang songs, and wore the first hour away.

Then when one and two o'clock had come and passed, the cold and monotony of waiting began to tell upon them. First one and then another grew horribly sleepy and yawned. The women shivered and dozed in their wraps, and at last one man said decisively:

“I reckon the thing's not going to work. I am going right along home.”

This was the signal for the whole party to rise with cheerful acquiescence. Most of them were so sleepy they had ceased to care whether the geyser played or not. Only Eva sat still. She did not look sleepy nor cold. Neil bent over her.

“I feel quite sure the geyser is going to rise and pretty soon now. Wouldn't you like to

stay a little longer, or would you be afraid?"

She looked up quickly.

"Afraid! I shouldn't be afraid anywhere with you," she answered, and the American felt his heart beat with pleasure.

"The coach is starting, shall we let it go and walk home?" he asked, as the last tourist swung himself thankfully up the side, and the driver shouted "All aboard."

"Yes, we can walk quite well," she answered; "let the coach go."

"Aren't you coming, Neil?" called out a friend.

"No, I am going to see the thing through now I am here," he answered.

"Well, you'll just have something to tell us in the morning if the old thing gets up after all. Good night!" and the coach rattled off.

It was very still: not a sound came from the forest; the moon dropped slowly through the limpid sky; their fire had burned to a still, red core of heat; the man and girl sat close by it watching. Once as they sat without speaking, one of the Yellowstone bears came out of the

surrounding belt of trees and ambled across the open space in front of them. The great, velvety fellow threw his head over his shoulder and looked at them steadily for a moment, snuffing the air, then, as they made no hostile movement, he ambled on and disappeared in the forest. They waited while another hour of silver silence stole by, and ever the boiling water brimmed over the edge of the pool, spreading itself silently towards them, like a sinister hand groping after victims.

Then with a sudden roar, like the roar of a wild beast, and a tremor that ran through the whole formation, the geyser rose in its majesty, the surface of the water was flung upward, the whole mass of the water reared itself up eighty feet in the air, boiling, hissing, shrieking as if it were a soul in agony, dazzling white in the moonlight, throwing off clouds of steam which floated away, coloured with a thousand rainbows, that were dissipated in the silver air and spray that fell like showers of diamonds. Unlike the other geysers, from the surface of which rises a jet or narrow column of water, the

entire volume of this one is thrown into the air and remains a solid standing body from which great limb-like jets of water are pushed out from moment to moment. The whole seems like a colossal human figure, shrouded in a sheet, struggling violently to free itself, throwing out its arms wildly, this way and that, in mad efforts to fling off its clinging stifling veils, and giving vent to convulsive smothered screams. Illusion is complete, and the two solitary spectators on the edge sat motionless, awe-struck, staring at this revelation of Nature in agony. Shrieking, groaning in direst pain, pitifully imploring for help, the great figure swung from side to side, stretching out its arms, enveloped always in its clinging white draperies, now towards them, now towards the calm and jewelled sky. Desperately under its muffling sheet of white, among its veils of steam, it fought and struggled, calling aloud to the silent heavens for relief, for liberation. For twenty minutes the twisting mass of water stood at its greatest height, then it sank and fell lower; the giant prisoner, as if exhausted,

seemed to droop; the wild cries changed to low moans.

Eva laid a hand on her companion's arm; he turned and saw her eyes were wide with attention and full of tears.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she whispered. "Is it not almost heartrending? It seems as if it must be a living thing, struggling to escape from that awful boiling cradle. Look at it! Look now! it seems to beckon *us*."

With a louder, more piercing, shriek the geyser had again risen to its highest pitch; the fury of the tortured water was at its height, swayed slightly by the draught it created. The figure seemed, as the girl said, to lean towards them, to throw out its white waving arms toward them. For an instant only, then the body staggered and wavered and sank; its strength was failing; the struggle was over. With sobbing cries, like those torn from an anguished human breast, it fell back exhausted to its prison home. Down, lower and lower, never ceasing its despairing sobs, it descended, until at last before the strained eyes of the

watchers there was nothing but the smooth black surface of the boiling pool. The apparition was gone; the last smothered, gurgling groan died upon the air, and all was completely still; the prisoner was drawn back to its terrible prison from which through the dull æons of the years it had tried fruitlessly to escape—drawn back by that mysterious, invisible, irresistible force that is the law of its being.

The girl shivered.

“How sad it seems,” she said, “to look on and not be able to help. Did it not seem in wild distress as if longing to leap out; it was beautiful, magnificent but terrible, don’t you think? I feel so sorry for it.” The American laughed.

“Oh, I reckon the geyser is all right; you needn’t worry about it. If it has a jollification and a burst up like this every few years it prevents it getting dull.”

“It did not seem very happy,” remarked the girl thoughtfully, her eyes fixed on the black lake in front of them, strangely tranquil now; motionless.

The man glanced round; it was nearing four in the morning and the moon was sinking. The cold was great, but the beauty of the spectacle had absorbed their attention and prevented them feeling it. Now the biting air pierced home. Neil rose to his feet.

"We must be getting back," he said.

The girl looked up, and the great stillness, the sublime solitude of the vast arena in which they were, the beauty of the mingling lights, the deep glow of the red fire and the fading moon-rays, impressed her deeply. The scene had all that fierce, grand beauty of America that so delights the eye unused to it. She felt no fear of the cold nor of the solitude. Looking up at his tall, strong figure above her, she felt confident that he could protect her against all dangers. She would have liked to stay there and watch through this night of silent beauty, till the dawn came up again in all its splendour. She rose reluctantly.

"I will come," she said, "but I must go and have a look at the geyser first. I feel sorry for it. It seemed to call, appeal to *me*."

He laughed good-naturedly.

"I'll fetch you an extra wrap," he answered. "Don't go near the edge," he called back, as he went towards the camp fire.

The girl moved over the formation towards the jagged brink, and stood there, looking down into the now quiet, black mirror of the boiling lake; little swirls of steam rose from it here and there. The moonlight fell on her and her image, dainty and fairy-like, showed in the dark mirror beneath. Suddenly a little crack like the break of steel . . . a call of terror. Neil turning from the fire, saw the slender figure disappear; a volume of steam rushed up as the water foamed over the crumbling edge. Like a madman he tore to the brink and plunged in after her as the formation split into long fissures under his feet. A projecting ledge of rock about four feet down had caught the girl. From this his strong arms lifted her, raised her. Scalded and blinded he struggled to the rim and half threw, half pushed her, maimed, inert, senseless with pain, on to the solid limestone. The water hissed and foamed

in boiling waves to his shoulders as he took back its prey. The next moment he had sprung out. An agony such as he had never dreamed of in his life, wrapt him from knee to shoulder. He staggered back with her to the bank where their coats and rugs had been left.

“Say, are you hurt very much? Are you in great pain?”

“Not so very much,” came back her voice. It was only a whisper, but what a dreadful sound of pain it had! He looked down at her face in the bright white light. It was like marble; but the eyes were dilated and strangely luminous; under his gaze the lips trembled into their sweet little familiar smile. He dropped to his knees on the bank, and commenced to wrap a rug round her to protect her from the freezing air. As he did so an irrepressible groan of agony broke from him.

“How good of you to save me! How good of you!” she whispered. He bent over her. Such an overwhelming sensation of love for her filled him that for the moment it completely conquered his pain.

“Dearest, if we both get through this, nothing shall ever part us. You love me—say you do?”

One arm came round his neck; the other hung helpless.

“You know I do; I love you.”

“You will marry me?”

“Yes.”

The black pines stood round in their solemn ring; the formation gleamed cruelly behind him; the jagged black mouth of the now silent geyser grinned.

The man’s agony was almost unendurable, but the words poured new strength into him. He raised his head, and his lips were firm.

“I must try and carry you home, darling.”

“It will be too much for you,” she murmured. “You must be so hurt.”

“No, you are no weight. I shall do it easily. I like to carry you. Are you suffering very much?”

“No, don’t worry about me.”

The man strode on. His heavy leather boots

had protected his feet—the pain was not there, well, Heaven be thanked for that; he could walk. From the middle of the leg to the waist he felt on fire; the torment of the scalded flesh lashed him. He walked at a furious pace, though the sweat broke out on his forehead from sheer agony, and rolled down his face in the icy night. It was very still, the road white and silent before him; the hills in their beautiful outlines on the horizon showing dark against the calm and radiant sky. How long the distance seemed! Would it never end, this long white road? this torture of burning flesh? Yet in all his pain, his thoughts leapt about as he pressed his precious burden to him. How light she was! How like those white butterflies so delicate and fragile. Was she suffering much he wondered! No, she would faint or cry out he thought. Her eyes were wide open, and whenever he looked down at her she smiled. Those smiles were like draughts of wine to him. Heaven be thanked! She could not be much hurt if she could so smile. His own torture seemed to grow. But what did it matter? he

had saved her. He was strong; he could suffer and set his teeth and not care.

At last the hotel came in sight. At the threshold he almost fell, stiff, cramped, exhausted, sick with pain. He was just able to reach a bench and sink down on it, still holding the girl in his arms. His head swam. As in a dream, he saw first one white, frightened face peer at him, then another, till he was surrounded by an ocean of them. His burden was taken from him and laid on another bench. He saw a man—a doctor he supposed—bend over it and lift the rug away he had so carefully wrapped round it. How still the girl lay. A terror gripped his heart, and, with agony in every movement, he staggered on to his feet again. Some hands held him back, at the same moment he heard a cold measured voice say: "Nothing is of any use, she is already dead."

He tore himself away from the detaining fingers and pushed his way to the doctor's side.

"Dead?" he repeated wildly. "Why? Why? I got her out at once. She did not seem to suffer much. What has killed her?"

He saw the doctor's cold, unmoved face as in a red mist. He heard him answer as from a long distance:

"Shock, I should say, my dear sir, and the extreme agony she must have been in."

Extreme agony for her! the little delicate white butterfly! And she had smiled at him through it all in silence as he had carried her! The thoughts seemed to strike his brain like blows. The next minute all was dark before his eyes. Then suddenly he fell with a crash amongst the awed men and sobbing women.

"He jumped in after her!" "He risked his life!" "What a hero!" "Jumped into the boiling water!" ran in whispers round him as, shuddering, some of the men stooped and carried him over the threshold.

Two months later he was able to leave the Yellowstone, looking aged and careworn, with lines of pain stamped deep in his face, and many seams and scars upon his body, but deeper far than any was the scar upon his memory. Never could he forget the red agony of

that night in the mountain park, nor the girl who had died so quietly, in such a brave silence, in his arms: the little white butterfly with the courageous soul, and so he is still a bachelor.

THE VISION OF LOVE

THE corridor above the great hall of Braithwaite Abbey was wrapped in thick shadow, the only light in it seemed to emanate from the white arms and shoulders of a girl who leant on the balustrade, looking over into the space beneath.

Lamps were still burning there though midnight had already struck, and her eyes followed wistfully, intently, the movements of a man's figure below, as he walked restlessly backwards and forwards over the great stone flags.

Every now and then he would stop by the open hearth and pause there, looking into its dying fire, and the red glow fell on a face, handsome in every line, but stamped now with a look of absolute despair.

He was smoking absently, feverishly it seemed, for he would light a cigarette and then lay it down and leave it to go out, then pick

it up, light it again and again lay it down, like a man whose brain takes no heed of what his muscles are doing.

Finally he threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands, and a low groan came up to the listening, watching girl.

Her white hand closed hard on the balustrade at the sound, and she leant still lower over it, while the eyes that gazed down upon him, grew more intensely yearning.

Suddenly the man started up, gathered together some papers on a table near him, and with a decided step walked across the hall and disappeared through the pillared arches at the end.

The girl above waited, but he did not come back, and after a few minutes she turned away, went down the corridor and entered her own room.

It was a beautiful room, like all of those at the Abbey, and it struck her so, as she turned the switch and flooded the place with light, but she had not been happy there.

Her visit came to an end tomorrow, and

but for leaving *him*, she would not regret it. Of the house-party she had been admitted to be the least important and least noticeable guest, and such a fact does not contribute to a woman's pleasure; also she was the poorest. All her clothes were just a little less fashionable than the other women's. Not rich enough to possess a maid, her hair was never quite so well done as theirs. The youngest of any of them, even this seemed against her, in a society where smartness was everything.

The kindest of the men and women had simply ignored her, the others had laughed at and made fun of her.

But now it was over and she was going and nothing mattered at all, except that she was parting from him, perhaps never to see him again. He had been the only thing that had really mattered, after all, the whole time. She had not cared very much when the women smiled at her short simple frocks, but when his great dark eyes had looked over her, absently, as if he did not see her, ah, that had hurt! And she was far too timid to speak to him! one is so

stupidly timid at seventeen! If they could only have had one little talk together, how she would have enjoyed it! but he had always been with the older women, those witty, laughing women, or the men.

Now she was going away, and, that which seemed so dreadful, she knew after what she had seen that she was leaving him in the grip of some great trouble.

“What can it be?” she asked herself, over and over again, “money? debts? disgrace? If I only knew! if I could only help him!” And the bitter thought came quickly in answer— young, poor, insignificant, she could do nothing.

It seemed as if it would be impossible to sleep. She sat there, tense, motionless, hearing that terrible groan he had given, in all the air about her. Then suddenly she rose and undressed and threw herself on the bed in a passion of tears. “I can do nothing, nothing. What is the use of loving a person if one is poor and helpless?”

While all sound gradually died down into

silence and even the girl fell asleep, worn out with tears, the man downstairs, Eric Allan, paced up and down his room on the lower floor, in an agony of indecision and despair.

Wonderfully handsome and attractive, young, as the thick, black hair and strong, lissom figure testified, with all the best gifts the Gods can give, in his hands, his straight, beautiful features seemed contracted with misery, his clear, smooth skin drawn and lined with pain.

“What a fool I have been!” he exclaimed to himself, coming up to the table and letting his haggard, burning eyes wander over its disordered piles of papers. “Debts, summonses, claims, and nothing to meet them with; and now not able to pay even Carlyon my card debts. It’s time I went, I think. Why not shoot myself and have done with it all?” He flung himself into a chair and stared blankly opposite him.

“I can’t raise another penny anywhere that I can see. . . . That game to-night, I only played to get something, and then lost. . . . I

wonder if Carlyon plays straight? . . . Don't let me begin to doubt my host. No, it's my own fault. I think a pistol is the best cure for me."

There was a long silence while the man thought, heavy, painful thoughts that drag across the brain, cutting it.

"There seems no way out, nothing I can do . . . of course I could work. There must be something I am fit for, but then . . . is it worth it? I don't know that this life's much fun . . . I have done most things. . . . I wonder what love is? I've never met *that*. I wonder if I found a woman now who really loved me, without any other motive whatever, I should feel differently?"

He was silent again, while before him, passed in review, images of women he had known and now knew, beautiful faces, sweet voices, lovely forms, but always floating with them, came a misty memory of gold and jewels given them, of sacrifices made for them, of fresh debts contracted of iron fetters, those soft, small hands had forged for him.

He sprang to his feet again, a pallor of death on his face.

“No, curse them all,” he muttered. “They have only helped in the general destruction. I want no more of them. I’ve done with them and this maddening existence. One shot settles it all.”

He crossed over to a writing-table, unlocked a drawer and took out a revolver. He looked it over carefully, saw it was loaded, cocked it, and then, suddenly, the creak of a door opening, startled him. He turned round sharply. His door was open, and on its threshold stood the fairest being he thought his eyes had ever rested upon. He stood transfixed, motionless, his heart beating. A girl stood there, so young, she seemed almost a child, in the long, straight night-gown that fell to her little bare ivory feet and opened at her throat, showing a warm column of rose-tinted neck. Above her brows rested masses of fair hair, which fell in shining waves, unbound upon her shoulders. Her face was very pale, delicate, transparent almost, and her eyes, wide open, looked fear-

lessly into the room before her. The man stood still, hardly breathing, expecting her to speak. But she came in quite silently and without a sound, glided round the table in the centre, softly, gently, avoiding the furniture, and approached him. She came quite close to him, and then raised one hand and laid it on his arm and looked into his face. Allan gazed down upon her, and his whole soul seemed suddenly upraised like that of one who sees a heavenly apparition. In that countenance was shining love unconcealed, untrammelled, ecstatic, that glorious vision beautiful that men and women seek to banish from this world; innocent, appealing, devoted, unafraid, love looked up to him. The girl's lips were a little parted, but no sound came from them, and, gazing into those blue, wide-open eyes, he saw, that, tender, heavenly though they were, consciousness was veiled behind the cloud of sleep. Nothing was there but love, that love which was part of herself and could not be lost, even in sleep. Intelligence, meaning, knowledge, was all lost, leaving love alone and triumphant. With those

wonderful, melting eyes on his, eyes that seemed to speak to him of life's mysteries he had still to learn, she put her other hand softly on the revolver that he held, closing her delicate fingers round and over the muzzle, and the man stood still, unable to move.

He recognised the girl as a fellow guest in the house, he saw she was walking in her sleep, but his inner-self was not occupied with these things. To it, she was Love incarnate, come into that room, where he had invoked Death, to drive it forth and triumph. How lovely she was! How exquisite in that transcending power of emotion! Never in all his life had he seen the glory we call "of heaven" so reflected in a human face. And suddenly in one mad passionate rush of feeling that shook him from head to foot, he realised that it shone there *for him*. He had called it there. Unconscious now though her action was, love for him in her waking moments, was its hidden spring. And such love! in a form of earthly beauty, he saw displayed for him, the whole dazzling wonder of a woman's soul.

The thought of death rolled from his brain like a dark cloud, he heard all the voices of triumphant life calling in his heart and blood. Yes, he would live! and into those dark eyes of his, meeting hers, as they stood there, eyes which had never seen her as she was, till now, came such a fire of tenderness and passion that it reached her sleeping brain and satisfied it. Slowly she relaxed her hold upon the weapon, yet she still stood gazing at him, that magic love pouring on him from her eyes. "You promise me?" they seemed to say, and Allan quivered from head to foot with the longing to seize her in his arms and press his lips on those flower-like ones before him. Never, hitherto, had he denied himself a kiss that he could get, but here he felt afraid. He could not trespass here. She was too sacred, too defenceless, too divine. A few seconds more they stood there, then noiselessly, slowly, she glided from his side, passed to the door, over the threshold, and was gone. For a moment Eric remained spell-bound, gazing at the door, wondering if he had seen a celestial vision, as indeed he had. To

few is it allowed to see what he had seen, the inner human soul, burning in the white flame of passionate love, divested of every other quality, free from all those shams and pretences that cling round it in the world, apart from all self-interest, deprived even of consciousness of self, he had seen this and he recognised it was Divine.

He turned to the long windows and saw the light was just breaking. With his wild, impetuous being shaken in a great re-action, he went to the writing-table, replaced the revolver in the drawer, locking it, and then stepped out upon the lawn. All round him was the dim radiance of a spring morning. The melody of a thousand birds filled the air, the whole of Nature's world was rejoicing; and in a mad gust of exultation, he realised that he lived. And had she not come, he would now have been lying there dead, dishonoured, blind, deaf, cold, instead of here with all the resistless tide of his glorious youth and health and strength, surging in his veins, and asking him how he could have planned its destruction. Why, how could

he have thought of dying for a few wretched debts, some mere worldly considerations, and leaving all this rapture of the earth and the stored up joyous mysteries of a woman's love behind him?

He walked down the lawn and through the grounds, the light strengthening all about him, just as the hope and courage seemed growing within himself. With buoyant steps he went through the woods where the gossamer threads, sparkling with dew, made a silver splendour, and back by soft, mossy paths where the green shadow was deep and cool, and the scent of the firs floated above him. He regained the lawn, and there paused for a long time, gazing up at the grim, grey outlines of the Abbey, massed against the luminous wonder of the pearly sky. All the wealth and power and worldly good that it represented, he was without, and those worldly fetters of debt that he had taken on himself clung to him still, but he would go out into the wilderness, and somewhere under the blue and living heavens he would work and work till all was paid to the uttermost farthing,

and his honour was clear, and in the wilderness those white hands should lead and caress him.

Suddenly, as he stood there, listening to the thrilling joy of the birds poured out in the fragrant air, he saw a slight figure in blue serge come down the steps, on to the gravel walk, and went forward to meet it.

The girl looked pale in the early light, and her eyes were sad, but a sweet little smile curved her red lips as she saw him advance.

Eric, with all the hot blood in his head, and his brain overturned under the weight of the emotions rolling over it, longed to draw her into his arms, but he restrained himself, holding out his hand.

“Miss Rivers, Stella, darling, you are going away to-day, but you shall not go alone. Let us go together. My own, will you marry me? I know that you love me.”

And not even the amaze, the bewilderment, the wonder in all her startled face, could hide the conquering delight that rushed over it and shone in it. His quick eyes reading this, he drew her closer.

“I am poor, I have nothing, I am dishonoured, but all shall be redeemed. Come with me into the wilderness and it shall blossom like a rose for us.”

“Eric, I don’t understand . . . I can’t think why . . . how . . . it all is, but, oh yes, I do love you, adore you, with my whole soul I only want to be with you.”

And then in that passion of joy that Nature holds locked in her hands for each one of us, and that is worth ten thousand times all the things of the world, its mines, its armaments, its wealth, its power, he threw his arm round her, and they kissed in the light of the young day.

THE PRICE OF AN HOUR

OUTSIDE, the streets were wet and dark, and the yellow November fog was creeping slowly about in them. Inside the large, comfortable study of the Manwarings' house, the fire blazed cheerily, the electric light threw out its warm radiance, the roar of London's voice, beyond the solid windows and heavy curtains, sounded muffled and far away.

John Manwaring stood on the hearth-rug, and his wife gazed at him lovingly from the depths of the armchair. He was a success! and it was she who largely had made him so.

As all men do, to the women they live with, he had given to her at the beginning the keys of his life. In her hands it lay whether he should succeed or fail, be ill or well, happy or unhappy. Seven years since their wedding-day had gone by, and he had succeeded, he was well, he was happy. She looked upon her work with loving pride.

He had won his seat in Parliament by a large majority. To-morrow he would make his first speech in the House. To-night he was going to a big dinner given to him by his supporters. How animated, pleased, elated he looked! She delighted in gazing on him and feeling vibrate through her, his feelings of triumph, of joy in his life. What an ovation awaited him to-morrow, she thought, letting her eyes wander slowly over the dear figure, straight and tall and exceedingly pleasing, to the handsome head, the black hair, the fine forehead and features, the warm glow of health in the clear skin. He had all that beauty and charm of appearance that introduce an orator so favourably to his audience; before he opens his lips his battle is half won, and if, when they are opened, power and intellect flow from them in passionate melody of tone, such as she knew this man was master of, he becomes irresistible. He looked to her, standing there, like a king whom Life had crowned with its greatest gifts.

“Well, darling, come and kiss me!” he said, smiling into her adoring face. “With your

kiss on my lips I shall speak so much better at the dinner. I wish you were coming with me!"

She rose, and with one swift movement was in his arms.

"I wish I were! But I know how you will speak! like one inspired, and carry them all away! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my sweet," he said, his lips on hers. "I shall be very late, perhaps, but I shall find you in my room to-night, sha'n't I?"

A shiver went through the form on his breast. She raised her head hastily.

"Oh, not to-night, dearest! We must not think of it! Remember to-morrow is everything to you! You will be late this evening, anyway. You will need all the rest and sleep you can get. I want your nerves to be as firm and strong as steel when you speak in the House, and your brain at its best. I shall go to my own room. I must for your sake."

He held her away from him and looked down at her half laughing, half sadly.

"What a dear, wonderful little Spartan you

are! But I wonder sometimes if you do really love me and want me as I do you."

The girl, for she was not much more in age, seemed to shrink, and her form to crumple up with shock and pain, just as if a knife had been thrust into her bosom. The words hurt so. Her situation, like so many in life, was so cruel, so impossible to deal with. It seemed to grind her to death at times, as if she were caught between the steel teeth of a trap.

She sank back into the chair, her face white with anguish.

"I can't help what you think," she said desperately, in a low tone, knotting her hands together in her lap. "I can't do anything but refuse you. You ought to know that I love you to distraction."

"Darling, forgive me, I do know," he said, impulsively, bending over her and kissing her again.

"Good night, then!"

The door opened.

"Your car, sir, is at the door."

“Very good, I’m coming,” and after straining her to him in a last embrace, he went out.

The girl bent her head down on the cushioned arm of the chair in a passion of tears.

The scene just passed through was one of a long series that occurred between these two beings—the man, passionate, excitable, impulsive, pleasure-loving, seeking gratification, yet regretting its price; the woman, loving, tender, wise, protective, maternal, trying to shield him at all costs to herself, from the passion that seemed too like a devouring flame that would consume his life and his powers.

After a time, her sobs ceased. She sat up and gazed into the fire, silent, absorbed in her thoughts.

She remembered the evening of their engagement, how he had said to her as he kissed her, “I love you so intensely I am afraid it will prevent me doing anything else. I should like my wife to help me if possible in my career, help me to work. Will you promise to do that?” And she had promised. She remembered the first year of their marriage, before the birth and

death of their child. What a dream of passionate delight it had been! The house in the country, the wild hill walks together, the hours in the sunny rose-gardens, the moonlight nights of love, that left them only inclined to doze and dream away the bright morning hours. Truly wonderful that time had been, a circle of jewelled days. At the end she woke up to see this was not keeping her promise. This was not helping him to work, to develop the great talents that she knew lay beneath his light, sunny temper as the hidden diamond mines lie under the bright landscape. When she realised all this on her awakening, she rose to act.

The country house was given up, the rose gardens where they had known such rapture were abandoned. They came to town; he entered the lists for the fight; he contested and won his seat. He had told her, the wish of his heart was this. But at what a cost to her! For she had soon seen it was more than the life of idle ease, more than the country house that must be given up. It was their passionate love that must be sacrificed. The Moloch of mod-

ern worldly success demands from us nothing but our best, even as did the Moloch of ancient days.

It was Manwaring's love for her, his passion, his delight in her, that sapped his strength and left his brain empty of ideas, his mind tired and listless, his body demanding rest not effort, and when his wife saw this, the image of Delilah rose in her mind, with Samson bound and helpless at her feet.

She explained all this to him. She talked to him, and he knew it as well as she did, and agreed to it, but what are explanations, and what are words, and what are resolves, even, in the face of desire? Manwaring was like a child, as all men are, praying for a thing one moment, that he regretted accepting the next, insisting on her love over-night, reproaching her for it the following day. Hers was the part so often allotted to the woman, whether as maiden or wife, to be strong as iron, inflexible as ice, in the face of his entreaties, in the face of the flames of her own passion for him. To resist, to refuse, to deny, when she was being

urged, implored, commanded to do what she herself most ardently longed to do, yet dared not for his sake. Such was her almost super-human task, but she had done it. For six years now, she had worked for him, with him, guarded him, tended him, so ordered his life that every smallest circumstance in it should tend to his health, his strength, his success. Herself was nothing to her. She had crushed and subdued and chained and starved it, and suffered acutely always from the bitter knowledge that he could not fathom the depth of her sacrifice, that, perhaps, as he had hinted to-night, he only misunderstood! For no man of his temperament and physique exactly understands himself. Full of tremendous nervous force and energy, alive with keen impulses and desires, it does not occur to him how he can over-draw upon that splendid vitality. He over-strains, over-works himself willingly, as a race-horse will. He is tired. What does that matter! A stimulant makes him feel doubly well, ready to over-tax himself again. He does not see the spectres of collapse, paralysis, madness, that

the far-seeing eyes of the woman who loves him perceive with horror.

Manwaring was in those dangerous years that lie between forty and fifty, when the full tide of life seems to rise to its highest, and yet beneath is the creeping undertow, drawing secretly and implacably the strong swimmer towards the icy depth of age. At that time a man has to choose whether he will follow his passions and affections or the gods this world has set up.

Manwaring would not accept this, would not acknowledge it, but his wife knew it, and the iron cruelty of it went into her soul and wrung it—just as agony wrung those ancient African women's souls who saw their first-born darlings given to Moloch to be thrust living into his all-devouring furnace.

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As she sat there in the soft, red silence of the fire-lit room, the first little tinkle of the telephone bell and then the sharp whirring jar of it came to her.

She rose and walked over to the other end of

the room, sat down at Manwaring's desk, and wearily took up the receiver. Of late the telephone had rung almost continuously; she expected the usual query: "Is this Mrs. Manwaring?"

"Yes?" she said, listlessly. Then she bent forward suddenly, the colour flying from her cheeks, her eyes dilating.

"Ivan? Ivan? Is it you? I recognise your voice. Where are you?"

The receiver was pressed in close now to her white ear, her gold hair fluffed over its edge. She listened breathlessly as a dear familiar voice leapt to her over the wires.

"Are you alone in the room? Then, darling, I must say it! I am back from Russia. I have a little studio here. What are you doing this evening?"

"I am alone. Jack has gone out to a men's dinner."

Her heart beat so with surprise, excitement, pleasure, that little pants got into her voice and travelled over to his ear.

"May I come to see you then?"

"No, no, no, certainly not. Jack said he would kill you if you ever came here again."

She heard the man's laugh at the other end of the line.

"I will come all the same if it's to see *you*, if you'll let me!"

"I won't let you."

"Come to me then, just for an hour. You shall be perfectly safe and sacred. I will not detain you a minute more than you wish, but I am so hungry for the sight of you. I have come all the way back from Russia just for that. Come, do come! It can do no harm. No one need know!"

She trembled so the receiver almost fell from her hand.

"What is your address?"

"One hundred and thirteen West St. Andrew's Street, S.W."

"Give me a minute or two. Wait for me. You can ring again."

She turned from the telephone, tore a scrap of paper from the margin of a journal, and wrote down the address on it. In the whirling

confusion of her brain it might slip from her memory. Then she turned and walked over to the fire, stinging, lightning-like bolts of thought whizzing through her brain. Her whole soul leapt up in joy at the idea of seeing Ivan again; the beautiful, reckless, pleasure-loving Ivan, the careless, light-hearted Russian artist who had come into her life about two years ago, whose brain had flamed up with passion for her, who had offered her all that she desired so much in life and dared not accept from her husband.

As a fire burning sways objects to itself in its hot draught, so his passion had drawn her towards him. There had been a few motor drives together, a few teas, whitely innocent, but never to be forgotten by either of them. Then the husband's jealousy had intervened. Ivan had been forbidden the house; she had been forbidden to see him; he had left for Russia; she had dropped back into the ice-house of her married life, through the dim panes of which she could see the fires of love sparkling upon other hearths.

She did not complain. She loved her husband with a higher, better, more comprehensive love than she did Ivan, a maternal, all-sacrificing love, but she loved Ivan, too, as men love the sunshine, or the keen air, or the wine in their glasses, anything that adds brilliance and colour and joy to their lives.

Should she go now to see him, just for an hour? Bathe in the sunshine? Feel the keen air of life on her face? She paused irresolute on the hearth, every pulse clamouring, the blood racing and dancing in her veins. Just to see him! To see the beauty in his face! The wild passion in his eyes for her! To feel his kiss!

She had no thought beyond this; no idea of infidelity to her husband. To a refined and exalted nature it is not the actualities of love that appeal, it is the feeling of empire over another's emotions. Should she go? Her husband would not like it; it was not right; it was not wise, but oh, how incredibly she longed to go!

For two years now she had been an absolute slave to her duty. Might she not take one lit-

tle hour now for herself? an hour of pleasure, innocent though secret, harmless though forbidden?

The telephone rang again. She flew to it and listened.

“Well . . . well . . . yes, then, yes. I will come, *yes*.”

She hung up the receiver. As she turned from it the fire fell in with a crash of coal, and its strong scarlet light illuminated her.

One could easily realise how the man might hunger for the sight of her. She was lovely with the essential beauty of sex; one felt she was created for love and passion; from the warm gold of her thick rippling hair and the soft fair skin of her face and her wide dark eyes, to the long exquisite line of her figure, to the small and perfect foot beneath her rose-coloured skirt. She ran quickly and silently up to her room, wrapped herself in a dark cloak, descended, let herself out, walked a few steps, then called a taxi and drove to St. Andrew's Street.

In the cab it occurred to her suddenly that

she had not brought the slip of paper bearing his address with her. She must have left it lying on the desk by the telephone. No matter, she knew the direction, and nobody probably would even enter the room before she returned.

It seemed a long way up interminable flights of stairs to his studio at the top of the house, and when she arrived there she was white and breathless. Ivan's door stood wide open. He was expecting her. As her light, hesitating step fell on the landing, he came to the entrance. She was drawn over the threshold into his arms.

“Ivan! at last, after all this time!”

“Violet! darling!”

He kissed her. Ah, the wonder of some kisses! The realisation of joy given and received! Her senses swam in dizzy circles of delight as she saw the clear white of his face above her, the blue eyes dark with passionate tenderness, the straight brows, the glint of the lights on his hair.

He drew her over to his fire, and pressed her into a chair—a low, deep chair—and then knelt

by her, holding her hands close in his, looking into her face, devouring every detail of it, every ripple of her hair, with his gaze.

“How good of you to come! The delight that you have given me! The sight of you is like food and water to a man starving in the wilderness.”

“Even as she was starving in her wilderness! How strange this life can be!” she thought. She slipped one hand from his hold and clasped it over his, her warm soft palm upon his wrist, and so they remained for some moments absorbed, enfolded in an indefinable delight.

“Go and sit opposite me, Ivan,” she said softly, after a time. “I can only stay a very little while. I want to hear your news of all this time.”

She glanced round. The room, though not rich in any way, suggested ease, comfort. It was well-lighted, warm. Everywhere stood his pictures. Strong, powerful pictures; they confirmed what the room said of him. Here was an artist whose work was good enough

to provide him, from a single sale, with ease and comfort for a year. No need for him to grind or plod or toil. Within his brain lay the mint from which in a week of inspired labour, he could coin the ruddy gold. Her eyes came back from the room to its owner. Strong and lithe, glowing with the vitality of his thirty years, rich with that best wealth of all—youth—he sat opposite her watching her with a little smile. And beneath the truly Russian beauty of his face lay all that fine intelligence, that impetuous fire, that force of an ardent soul that also is truly Russian, and which makes this nationality irresistible in power and charm.

They talked on. He told her what she asked; he spoke of his art, his recent successes. She spoke of her husband. His place he had won; his triumph. And all the time the waves of her attraction flowed out to him and over him, calling him to her, and he felt each moment pass with a stinging tread upon his flesh; moments drawing them near to their parting. Yet he stayed where he was, as she had commanded him. She was his guest, and sacred.

And she gazed upon him, as a prisoner brought to his cell window might gaze on the light of Heaven, and drew strength out of his beauty and the joy it gave her, for the years to come.

Minutes flew on. The treacherous time slipped by. More than the hour passed. She rose to go. Ivan approached her for the last kiss. His face was deadly white and strained. He hardly knew if the kiss would be a pleasure or an agony to him, but he knew it would be a pleasure to her. She turned to him. . . . Hark! what was that? A firm, quick step upon the stair, a step she knew, her husband's. She left Ivan and advanced towards the door. It was thrown open and Manwaring entered. In one swift moment she knew that tragedy was upon them. His face was distorted. She could not recognise it. His eyes seemed set, unseeing. In his hand she saw the gleam of his revolver. His lips moved strangely.

"I said I would shoot you if I found you with this man again," and a blinding, suffocating horror of regret and terror rushed over her as she heard; not terror for herself—of her-

self she never thought—but terror for him. So he was to be sacrificed! He would shoot her and then himself. His life must pay forfeit! The dear life she had worked for, watched over, guarded all these years. And he was at life's topmost pinnacle now. His success so hardly won, his splendid powers, his life of promise, were to be flung away for her, wasted, lost through her. She sprang to him, she tried to take his arm.

“Wait, wait, till you have heard me. I can explain to you.”

But the man for the moment was transformed into a maniac. Before Ivan could reach her, before she could speak again, he had fired. Her soft breast and throat were close to him. Three bullets went into them. She sank to the floor between the two men, the blood welling from her mouth.

Instantly the flames of Manwaring's anger quenched. His eyes cleared. The madness of jealousy fell away from him, leaving him sane.

"God! what have I done?" he exclaimed, dropping on his knees beside her.

Ivan was supporting her head. Manwaring did not see or heed him. His eyes, stricken with agony, were fixed on her face, in which the shadow of death was gathering. She panted, struggled to speak, and did so in spite of the suffocating blood streaming from her lips.

"Jack, you must not die for me. I cannot have you throw away your life for me. Promise me you will live."

"No, no, no, not now, not to survive you, my darling, if I could." He bent over her. She felt his unavailing tears stream warmly on her face. She clasped her hands desperately on her bosom where the wound ate into her life. On the calm unruffled forehead, on the sweeping brows, sat a great resolution.

"My only anguish now," she whispered, "is to think *I* have destroyed your life. That life is mine. I worked for it, built it up and suffered in the building. It is a sacred trust.

You must carry it on. Your country wants you! Life calls you! go to it. You can. You are guiltless. Ivan! *I killed myself, do you hear? He is guiltless.*”

Ivan bowed over her.

“Yes, I am witness. He is guiltless.”

The darkening eyes turned on her husband.

“Let me die content—promise me?”

His face was grey with horror.

“I cannot live without you, and I cannot live a lie.”

“Dearest one, you will forget me in time. You have your work, your duty, and there shall be no lie.”

She stretched out one hand and clasped the revolver. Before either could stop her, before they realised her intent, she had turned the weapon against her wounded breast and emptied the two remaining shots into it.

Then she fell back motionless between them, and the two men knelt beside her, stricken utterly.

THEIR HONEYMOON

SHE was exquisitely pretty. Her hair was soft and glossy like spun glass in the sun, with a wonderful sheen on every golden curl of it; wide, sparkling, dark blue eyes and a pure white skin went well with her soft red mouth. She was just tall enough to be graceful, and her pale blue cloth dress and little blue hat, with the white rose tucked under the brim, suited her to perfection.

Merrily the trap spun along the shady road. Harrington always drove well, and his horses loved him; he was as dark as his bride of that morning was fair, with black hair that she dearly loved, straight, beautiful features, and a gay, distinguished air.

They were both so happy on this morning of the Egyptian spring. The sunlight was so bright that dropped between the trees, the fields of goodly standing crops, rich green and mustard yellow or claret pink, looked so brilliant

on either side of the cool, shady road that runs between arching lebbek trees from Cairo to the Pyramids.

Never had the lebbeks seemed so stately and their shade so grateful as to-day; never had their leaves rustled and whispered together so musically.

They were going out to the "Orient Hotel" to lunch, and then as the cool of the late afternoon advanced they were going—delight of delights—far into the mysterious desert to have the most romantic and novel honeymoon possible. It was to be but three days. That was the extent of his wedding leave, but they did not complain. That three days alone in the desert loomed upon before their vision, enchanting, all sufficing. It seemed to stretch into Eternity itself. It glowed to their eyes with such a dazzle of joy it quite blocked the view of anything or any time beyond. Nettie was just seventeen, and sitting that morning by Harrington, driving out to the Pyramids, she recognised she was a fortunate individual, and hugged her happiness and was grateful.

At seventeen usually the human being has potential happiness, but not actual. That is to say, he has his youth, his strength, his powers, his fresh-hearted capacity for joy. He could be happy, but he rarely is, for artificial circumstances and restraints block his way. He has the power to enjoy, but not the opportunity, and later in life he has the opportunity, but not the power. Rarely do these two come together. Therefore, rarely is the human being happy. But for the moment this girl held both in her soft and rosy hands, and she was gloriously content as she sat watching the sunny vistas on either side, and feeling the light air playing on her face.

“Of what is my Nettie thinking—she is so silent?” asked Harrington.

“I am almost too happy to talk,” she said, looking up at him. “It seems like enchantment. This motion along this beautiful road, with these fields on every side, so sunny, so animated, so laughing with crops, as it were, under the endless blue skies; and to think we are moving towards the desert, the vast un-

known, mysterious, shadowy desert. To think we are going into it to-night! Into its violet darkness, that it will receive us, perhaps swallow us up for ever! Perhaps we shall never come out!"

"Good heavens, I hope so!" returned the man, laughing. He threw back his handsome head, and the sun struck on his white and even teeth. He was full of the joy of life, secure in the possession of happiness and love.

"Of course, we shall, darling! Don't worry about that!"

"I'm not worrying. I'm absolutely happy. But the desert is like the future. One cannot tell what it holds."

When they reached the "Orient Hotel" the day was in its full glory. It was one of those wonderful Egyptian days when the sun is ablaze, but there is no oppressive heat, when the blue arch of the sky seems infinitely high above the earth, and is full of little clouds—white, round, light-filled clouds—when a fresh air stirs, and the atmosphere is clear as crystal,

and a thin, light, delicate breeze comes, cool, not hot, from out of the desert.

Basil lifted her from the trap—glorying in that moment, when her light weight pressed his arms—and his fox terrier sprang out after them. They were rather late, and most of the people were already in the luncheon room. Nettie and the dog went up the steps on to the verandah in the shade, to wait while Basil saw that the horse was looked after, and went to see where their table had been reserved for them. The girl sat down in one of the many lounge chairs, and the dog kept guard beside her. Her eyes looked out of the shaded verandah, where the scent of flowers from the garden at the side rose sweetly, far out through the dancing sunlight, towards the desert.

This was very nice and interesting, being all alone with Basil, really married that morning—how long ago the morning already seemed!—and lunching here with him was fun; but the transcendent charm of all was the coming night in the desert, alone with those myriad

year old sands, alone there in the dimness and the hush with him! She had seen the Pyramids and the Sphinx, she had climbed to the highest points, and snaked her body along the underground tunnels, where one can only crawl, and been into all the square dark chambers of those ancient tombs; but all this was not what caught her fancy most. These were on the edge of the great unexplored region. She had never been very far into it. But tonight they were going. It was the desert itself, with its remoteness, its silence, its wild sunsets that colour its sands to mauve and ruby, which attracted her, its solitary palms, its wandering winds, its lustrous midnights of blazing stars.

Basil rejoined her almost directly, and they went into luncheon, Jack, the terrier, being left on the verandah, where, with true canine self-abnegation, he curled himself round in a chair on his master's gloves, and docilely went off to sleep.

The restaurant was filled with gay lunchers and bright with sun and flowers. They went

to their table, which the waiter had thoughtfully selected for them in a secluded corner by a bank of greenery and bloom, but even here they were found out, and visited by numerous friends, who came up to joke, jest, laugh, and congratulate them. Nettie was all smiles, and talked gaily with them, her blue eyes sparkling with merriment; but in her heart she was longing for the peace and silence of the desert. After luncheon she went to pin her hat on more firmly, and fix a veil, for the camel ride, and as she stood before the looking-glass in the dressing-room, studying her reflection with joy, for she had never looked more lovely, a woman she knew in Cairo came up behind to rearrange *her* hat—and face.

“You know, my dear, I do think you’re misguided to go off into the desert for your honeymoon,” she said, fluffing a white chalky mixture all over her nose and cheeks. “Just fancy! No looking glasses, no bathrooms; not a soul to speak to; it will be awful!”

Nettie laughed gaily. “Mirage for looking glass, sun for a bath, we’ll be all right,” she

answered. "Au revoir." She slipped out and went down the outer passage of the hotel, which led to the verandah. She heard the desert sand blown with a tinkling sound against the outside of the wall, and forced through the wooden shutters with a sizzling noise. She paused and looked through one of the slits. There it lay, so bright, stretches and stretches of glittering sand, sunny, inviting as her wonderful future.

She found Basil and coffee waiting for her on the verandah; also Jack, who had had his luncheon brought out by an Arab waiter. Two fine riding camels were at the foot of the steps.

"I have had our suit-cases sent on," Basil said, as she came up, "and the man says the house is quite ready for us. Come and have some coffee; there's no need to hurry. It'll be getting cooler all the time."

They took their coffee and cigarettes, and saw most of the gay lunchers depart in various directions, some to the Pyramids, some back to Cairo. Then just as the sun was losing its

fierceness, they started. Basil helped her on to the kneeling camel, and she begged for Jack, and tucked him securely under one arm. Then Basil mounted, and, with a parting cheer from their few remaining acquaintances on the verandah, who had gathered in a little knot to see them start, they rode out into the sun and sand.

“Oh, Basil, this is perfectly lovely! I’m so happy,” she exclaimed, as she felt the stately, slow swing of the great beast under her as the two camels moved side by side into the desert.

“So glad, darling,” Basil answered, and he, too, felt that extreme elation of the soul that, alas! comes so rarely in sad, struggling human lives. Four and a half years of his life lay behind him engulfed in the war, scarred all over with suffering and pain. No matter! There were three bright days ahead of him now, bright as the sun that hung above in the radiant sky. They rode on easily with singing hearts, and, just as evening approached, they came into sight, over a ridge of drifted sand, of a low, square, mud-built house by a group

of palms. A veil of rose and gold colour was dropping over the desert, turning the shadows in the ripples of the sand to tender mauve and washing the house and palms in a rich saffron glow. A small bodyguard of six white-clothed figures came out of the house door to meet them.

Ahmed Ali Pasha owned the house, a wealthy Turkish gentleman, and when Basil heard of his darling's wish to spend their three precious days in the desert, he had at once thought of this place as suitable, and had gone to see Ahmed and put his request to him. Ahmed knew and liked the young English officer, and, without conditions, had set the house at his disposal for his honeymoon. He would hear of no pay and no reward. He was not using the house, he said, and the Captain was entirely welcome to it. More, he would send out there six of his own most trusted servants, and charge them with making the English comfortable there, cooking for them and seeing to all their wants. Basil had most gratefully accepted, and Nettie was wild with enthusiasm

over it all. Brought up as a child to be independent, to do everything for herself without help from a maid, and accustomed to travel, with all its accompanying discomforts and trials, which, to minds like hers, only mean fun and adventure, she had no misgivings about a mud house and Turkish attendants.

They dismounted in the golden glow, the camels were led off to a heap of green alfalfa lying at the side of the house, and Basil and Nettie entered at the main door. They stepped at once into a large, well-proportioned room. The floor was merely hardened mud, but perfectly clean—swept till its surface was smooth as marble. Two large square windows without glass, but with wooden shutters, now standing open, faced them. There were no chairs, but several low stools and a square wooden table, low to match. Across one end of the room swung scarlet curtains from a string stretched from wall to wall. Black, arched rafters formed a lofty ceiling. A vase of beautiful flowers stood on the table. That was all there was. Like Oriental rooms

in general, its characteristics were cleanliness, coolness, and space.

The head Turk showed them in deferentially, then closed the door softly. Basil and Nettie were at last by themselves. Their honeymoon had really begun. They just rushed into each other's arms, and sank down on one and the same low wooden stool at the back of the room, giving themselves up to a summer storm of kisses.

Presently he took off her hat and unwound the pale blue scarf from her neck. They parted the scarlet curtains and looked in. There was a low wooden bedstead, broad and comfortable-looking, with coloured blankets and white sheets, all exquisitely clean. A little oval mirror in a gilt frame had been tacked up to the wall. She put her hat, veil, and gloves down on the red quilt, and walked through the curtains again, drawing them behind her. Jack was running about their new quarters, snuffing for impossible rats in the clean corners. The silent-footed, white-robed attendant brought in tea for them on a shining

brass tray, and set it on the table by the open windows. Basil took his seat on one of the stools, and proceeded to pour it out for her. She sat just opposite him, gazing at him with delight in her eyes and a proudly beating heart. Beyond the windows the light failed in the quick Eastern way; the sky turned to deep orange and then rapidly paled to a clear, luminous green. The planet, Venus, in all her silver glory broke out in it and looked down upon them. A breath of delicious coolness came in and touched their faces. Nettie drank her tea, then pushed away her wooden seat, and slipped on to the floor by the window at his feet, bending her head back against his knee, and he played with the little golden tendrils of hair that curled about her forehead.

Suddenly a sound of whispering came to them from the outside. Then words in an undertone just from the side of the house. They paid no attention at first, lost in the sense of each other's propinquity and all the joyous excitement of the moment. Then as a bullet flies through space and strikes and kills, one

word came to them, borne in on that lovely evening air, from under the tranquil green of the sky. Basil saw that she had heard. He was looking down into her deep blue eyes, and he saw them change and dilate suddenly with horror.

“These people are speaking Arabic,” she whispered.

“Yes; do you understand it?”

“Yes.” Then they both listened intently, breathlessly.

“There’ll be some massacres to-night,” remarked one voice, low but jubilant. “Fine doings in Cairo, eh?” Here some listener was evidently nudged, and grunted appreciatively in return. “So few English officers there, most fortunate, so many given leave—lucky for them, lucky for us!”

“They are travelling all along the road from here to Cairo; the Bedouins are a great people. What can the English do against them when Allah leads? The Bedouins march along all roads,” here the speaker broke into a low, chant-like refrain. “The officers are on leave,

and their ladies dance. You know the 'Hotel Suisse'?"

An assenting grunt.

"They fire it to-night! The ladies will burn! Great is Allah!" There was silence. The listeners within waited breathlessly. Information was so valuable. Not a sound. Basil rose silently, leaned his hands on the window-sill, and looked out. There was no one near. He vaulted over the sill, and looked into the gathering dusk on every side. He went round the house. There was nothing, silence, and gathering shadow, and stars without. Within, lamplight at the back of the house and their servants moving hither and thither, busy with preparing their dinner. The messengers of evil omen had melted away into the dark, absolutely without trace. He came back. The girl was kneeling by the window where he had left her. She rose and came to him.

"Those were not our servants—they would be talking Turkish; those were passing Arabs!" He nodded, his eyes on the floor.

"Damn them! Damn them!" he broke out

furiously. "Why should they come by our window with their gossip?"

"You don't mean that, Basil!"

"I do. I don't care for anything except you to-night. I don't want to think of duty or country or anything but you. I want your kisses and your arms around me. I've slaved at duty for four years. I've waited for you for two. I've looked forward to this night for months. I'm off duty. I'm away. Damn them! I've only three days. Why didn't they keep away?"

She put her soft hand over his mouth. He was mad for the moment. Incoherent and beside himself. He took her hand from his lips.

"What shall I do?" he asked, more calmly. They looked at each other for a second in silence. They saw what this meant for them. Cold duty thrusting itself between them like a great wedge, separating them, just when all the fibres of their two beings were clinging together, when it was acute pain to take their hands from each other's, when that invisible,

mysterious all-powerful circle of electricity was round them, so that it needed real physical effort to break from contact with each other. Wild thoughts surged in a mad rush through his brain as he searched her eyes in that agonised moment. He remembered he had once said that he liked soft, silly, pretty women who were afraid of mice and spiders, were clinging, and needed protection. He hated heroics. Would she cling to him now? Ask him to stay, from love or fear? Beg him not to leave her? In that tense moment of lightning thought he had the extraordinary experience of longing to hear her appeal to him and give him the excuse to stay, yet, at the same time, feeling an agonised fear of her doing so, and so destroying for ever his respect for her. Further, he felt a terror that he would not be able to refuse if she asked, and so would for ever lose his respect for himself. So in a tangle of pain he seemed thirsting to hear the words he hated telling him to go, and yet loathing to hear the words he loved telling him to stay.

It was only a fleeting instant, for the girl had no hesitation. To her the way was quite clear.

"There isn't anything to do," she answered, "but to go back at once. Warn them at the hotel, get your men together, telephone headquarters."

He saw she was very white. Her great eyes were burning.

"What about you?"

"I'll do whatever you wish. If I can be the slightest use to you I'll come with you. If I shall only be a responsibility and a worry I'll stay here and wait—till you come back."

Do what she would to be calm, her lips quivered. He was going out to riot and disorder. He might never come back.

Basil thought rapidly. Where would she be safest? With the roads full of hostile Bedouins, Cairo in revolt, the spirit of licence and rioting abroad, the road to the town and the streets, when there, would be full of danger. She was better off here, perhaps, if she could stand it, and he would be freer, more able

to do and to accomplish without her. But to most women, a night alone in the desert, with only Turks to guard them, would be insupportable.

“Are you afraid to stay here?”

“Afraid!” she echoed. “I am afraid of nothing. Only think of what is best for yourself and for what you’ve got to do.”

“You feel you can trust these Turks?”

“I’m sure of it. I have lived in Turkey, I know them. I’d trust a Turk anywhere. Call them in and explain it all.”

“My own brave one! Oh, darling, this is all so different from what we dreamed of.” He stretched out his arms to her, and she flew to them, and locked hers round his neck. They kissed each other passionately, despairingly. Ah, such different kisses from the first gay, happy ones in this room! These were like the kisses before death.

He released her and called to the servants. They came at once—all of them—alarmed at his sharp-edged tones. He was not a great master of the language, but he had studied it,

and deep emotion spurred on his brain and found him the words. He told them what he had heard, said he had to return to his duty, and that he was going to leave his wife—a sacred charge—in their hands, and would they accept it? Their dark faces grew very grave, but the Oriental is brave and can look death in the face as well as any man. With one accord, without hesitation, they took the oath to protect her, even at the cost of their own lives. She said a few words in Turkish to them, and they brightened and smiled.

“Get the camel ready, I’m going at once,” he told them, as they salaamed again and withdrew.

Then he turned to the girl and took her once more into his arms. The dog, thoroughly uneasy with all the new sorrow in the air, whined at their feet.

“Take this,” Basil said, putting a little revolver into her hands. “It may be useful.”

“Keep it for yourself.”

“I have my own, a big one; this is small, but good. You know how to use it?” Nettie nodded.

“I’ll keep Jack; he’ll be safer here.”

“Darling, you are a brick.”

“Well, I ought to be—soldier’s daughter and soldier’s wife. Good-bye, dearest, I shall pray for you till you return, and wait here till you come, mind, no matter how long.”

An exclamation from outside startled them. They ran out together. The servants in a white-clothed group, stood round the alfalfa heap. The camels were gone!

Wildly they hunted round the house. It seemed impossible, but there was the fact. Without sound or trace, they had been spirited away. Silence and darkness, but for the flashing splendour of the stars, reigned now in the desert.

Basil was greatly disturbed. The long, hot, dangerous walk on foot moved him less than the question—had the servants been in collusion with the thieves? And if so, how could

he trust her to them? But Nettie seemed to read his thoughts. "I'm sure the Turks are all right," she said. "Perhaps those Arabs whom we heard talking took the camels."

He was relieved by her confidence. She steadied and calmed him, made his duty as easy as she could. There was nothing for it but to walk; there was no riding animal nearer than the "Orient Hotel." There he could pick up his trap, if, indeed, the hotel itself was not in the hands of howling Arabs. He set out with clenched teeth and a seething rage of anger in his heart. He looked back from a few paces, and the last he saw of her was her sweet figure in the doorway with the lamp, now lighted by the servants, shining behind her, his dog clasped in her arms, and a smile on her little red mouth.

Basil walked away to his duty like an Englishman, and like an Englishman, swearing.

He had only asked three days of Fate, and it begrudged him that.

The girl turned back into the empty room, and now there was no more need to check them,

let the tears surge up to her eyes and over the lid. She hated his going, hated being left. She wanted him so much. With the dog still clasped in her arms, she fell on her knees by the window and prayed. Her prayers were all for him. That he should be guarded, that he should reach Cairo in safety, that he might come back in safety. Of herself she never thought, for herself she did not pray.

Silent, sympathetic, and respectful, the servants brought in her dinner, and she, seeing how carefully they had prepared it, took a little of it all. The rest she told them to keep for him. "He may be back any time," she said, "and he may be hungry." She fed Jack, and got out a wrap from her suit case to make a bed for him. When the servants had cleared away, and the lamp and flowers stood alone on the table, one of the men paused by the door.

"Two of us will be on guard all night while the others sleep. We will take it in turns. We trust the lady will sleep."

"Thank you, all of you. I know you will

guard the house well. For myself, I shall spend the night in prayer.”

The Turk salaamed and withdrew.

Two hours passed and all was quite silent. The girl sat back, wearied with anxious thought and prayer, but no feeling nor idea of sleep came near her. She felt the sense of approaching ill, and sat wide-eyed to meet it. As she sat there alone, oppressed with vague foreboding and cold in the desert night, she thought with pleasure of the women dancing at the “Suisse,” of the warning that would be given in time, of the riot that would be checked, and the lives saved just because she had heard and understood that whispered conversation. She had no feeling of regret that she had heard. In spite of her anxiety for her lover, she was still great enough to be glad, and she believed he was, too, in spite of his frenzied words to the contrary. Suppose they had not heard, and then learned afterwards that their hours of passionate joy had been bought at the price of others’ lives, and enjoyed while they were crying vainly for help in the flames! What a

legacy of pain and regret always bound up with memories of their honeymoon!

Suddenly, without the least warning, a rifle shot that rang out through the stillness. She sprang up, darted to the windows, and drew the shutters to, bolting them firmly. At the same moment the door was opened and the Turkish servants crowded into the room. They dragged in with them the sentry, whose arm hung useless beside him. Then they shut the door and shot the heavy wooden bolts. Jack stood by the girl, growling and quivering.

“There’s a band of Bedouin rioters coming up from the desert, madam,” said one of the Turks, breathlessly, turning to her. “One of them shot the sentry, but perhaps they’re not all armed. Buldo, draw up the table across the corner and put a seat for the lady behind it. Hang the lamp on the wall! That’s right! Now the bed, and pile up the stools on the table.” The man addressed as Buldo pushed up the table with a will, the others collected rapidly the wooden seats and piled them on it. Nettie took a cord from her suit case and

fastened Jack up securely in the corner, taking her place in front of him and behind the table. The head man and one of the others dashed aside the curtains, and dragged forward the bed, stripping it of rugs and cushions, and heaping these on the table and all round the girl. Delay was their one idea. To protect her from stab and shot from moment to moment, since at any second help might come. The Captain was gone to the city. He would bring or send assistance soon, they felt sure.

One of the men stood by the door on the watch with his eye to the crack.

The wounded sentry sat on the floor with his back against the wall, while a companion banded his arm.

Nettie spoke to him cheeringly, and he looked up, smiling, and thanked her. She felt quite calm and no fear, only tension, great tension, and desire to do whatever was best in each moment as it came along.

“Here they are!” called the man on watch.
“I see nine of them.”

Immediately a yell and a burst of execra-

tions went up outside the house. There was another shot, and a bullet went whistling through the door and straight through the room. No one was hit. Nettie was safe in her corner, and the men ducked their heads as the missile went by. The next moment crashing blows of axe and hatchet fell on the stout door. The wood split and broke. More blows, the door crashed in, and the horde of Bedouins poured into the room. The Turks drew their knives, and fell back in a close line before the table, guarding the corner. Nettie, with her hand in the bosom of her dress on the revolver, stood watching her opportunity. She had but five shots. Each must tell. Only one of the Arabs had a rifle and apparently no more ammunition, for he did not fire again. The Turks fought magnificently with the ferocity and the deadly earnest of all brave things at bay. They were ready to die in her defence. Their sacred charge could not be reached except over their lifeless forms.

The Bedouins, their eyes lighted up with the lust of battle, their dusky faces aflame, pushed

forward in a solid block with bared knives, but four shots in succession came out of the corner, and each time a man fell, and a howl went up from the Arabs. They tried to rush the corner, but the numbers were now even—five to five—and they could not pass that barrier of Turkish courage and Turkish steel. Desperately, in hand to hand struggles, both sides fought. The Turks had had many wounds before her shots had evened the numbers. They went down one after another, but in their grip dragging their opponent with them. With agonised eyes, Nettie saw them sink to the floor. There was little noise in the room, only deep, quick breathing, scrape of the struggling feet, very rarely a gasp or a groan. Now only one standing figure remained, the leader of the Arabs, an immensely tall and powerful man. He came close up to the table, leaned on the barricade, looked hard into the fair face of the girl, and slowly sheathed his knife. Nettie saw the deliberate action, also the look in his eyes—eyes fixed on her, welling over with desire. The next instant he bent

slightly to grip and wrench away the fence her friends had made. Nettie held her little weapon steadily in her slim white fingers, and as he bent his head she fired straight into the forehead. He fell with a great crash to the floor, dragging part of the defences with him. Nettie climbed on the barricade, and then jumped from it to the ground. Through the smashed door she saw the whiteness of the dawn, and across the threshold lay one of the Arabs. He had tried to crawl out, and died there in the attempt. She stepped over him, and ran to the little lean-to kitchen built at the side of the house. There was water there in great earthenware cooling jars against the wall. She filled a pitcher with it, took up a cup and came back. The room, with its floor covered with the huddled forms, some moving and groaning, others rigidly still, with pale, up-turned faces, looked terrible as she entered it. The grey light of morning, hardly stronger than the failing lamplight, showed dimly, dark and moving stains on the ground. A feeble murmur of "Moiya, moiya," came from the

Arabs as they saw her pitcher. Jack was whining in his corner and straining at his cord. Nettie's lips were white, but resolutely folded. She stepped carefully and delicately amongst the fallen men, and gave each one that was conscious, water, putting her arm under his head as she held the cup to his lips. Her pitcher was nearly empty, and she stooped over one of the Arabs lying near the door to give him the last cupful. His eyes were closed and he made no movement, only repeated the word "Moiya" in a craving whisper. She bent near with her cup, and like a flash his right arm shot out of its great falling sleeve. With his last strength he drove his knife into her shoulder. He had aimed at her heart, but his muscles failed, and the point went sideways. The blow given, he rolled over with a guttural laugh, and grew still.

A stab with a sharp knife gives little pain at the moment. Nettie started up conscious only of a feeling of deep burning in the flesh. She thrust her handkerchief beneath her bodice, hard against the wound. She was rather

proud of it. In a way she was glad. She had hated to see her guard cut down while she was safe, hated to see them suffer while she was unhurt. She felt a slow trickle on her arm, in spite of the handkerchief, but it did not alarm her. She picked up the overturned cup and pitcher, and went again to the kitchen. Coming back with the water, her head swam suddenly, her knees trembled, and she sank down by the wall. She would have stayed there, she felt so strangely tired, but she heard Jack whining piteously within, and after a few seconds nerved herself to go on. She crossed the threshold, stepping over its silent guardian, and entered the dim room. She found her way to the dog, and gave him some water. He drank it thirstily, and licked her hand in gratitude. She slid down beside him. She wanted to go to the Turks and see if she could bind up their wounds, but she could not move. She looked at their vague and shadowy forms lying round her. All seemed growing far off and dim. The groaning and the sighing had almost ceased. Her eyes closed, and she seemed

unable to open them again. The lamp went out, and there was silence.

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A little later the sun broke fully over the desert, and the great shafts of light struck Ahmed's house by the palms. At the same moment a little knot of horsemen galloped over the sand drift and came up to the wide-standing door.

Harrington entered first. "Nettie," he called, and then again in agony, "Nettie! Nettie!" but only the clamour of the dog answered him.

TRIUMPH

THE sun was sinking behind the far blue hills and the whole sky was glowing with a radiant flush of rose. The earth, too, seemed dipped in the warm reflection; everything took on the same hue of lustrous pink as if all were dyed in some magic, sparkling, rosy wine. Trees and rolling hills, meadows and little brooks, brown cattle and white cottages, all gained added beauty from the soft enchanting light. And on one thing above all others it seemed to fall with a divine touch, the up-turned face of a girl, as she stood by the stile on the slope of the hill by her cottage. A man stood beside her, looking down on her, and it seemed to him that his eyes had never rested on anything so lovely as her face. Her hair and eyebrows were dark, her eyes dark and beautiful, but the transcendent charm of her face lay in the glory of the skin. White and transparent as the finest porcelain, with a lovely glow of colour in the cheek, one could have held

a wild-rose against it, and its fairness could not have suffered in the comparison. Nature, the divine artist, had here accomplished a masterpiece, and at this moment the setting sun was throwing on it the light of heaven.

“Rosa, darling Rosa,” the man murmured, as his fascinated eyes wandered over her face. “Why do you look so wonderful this very night we’ve got to part? I’ve never seen you so lovely.”

“It’s the sunset, Jim, that’s all: one always looks nice in the pink light.”

“I love you, I *do* love you, oh, how I love you!” he murmured, tightening his arms round her waist and gazing with devouring eyes into her face, where the colour grew a little deeper under the pure, pearly, transparent skin. To see her blush was like looking at a red light through an alabaster screen. The man did not know why he loved her; he only knew that the pleasure he drank in through his eyes, fixed on her, was so great, that he didn’t even want to bend down to kiss her and so break the spell of sight.

"I can't go. I can't go and leave you."

She heard real agony in his voice; his brows were drawn together, as in deep pain.

"Oh, but you must, dearest. We've no right to think of ourselves now. You must go, and I will wait for you, and I won't be idle either, I will do something to help."

The man held her in silence. His clutch on her waist had less of the touch of an embrace than the grip of the drowning man on the life-belt. He felt in that moment, gazing on her sunlit face, that she was his life, his all. Parted from her, it seemed, a cold sea of despair, an ocean of unknown desolation would close over his head.

With a sudden movement he dragged her towards him, hard against his breast. A suffocating sob broke from him, and he buried his face in the silky wealth of her hair.

"Oh, Rosa, I can't leave you."

She put up both arms round his neck, and her soft bright lips to his ear.

"Jim! my own darling brave heroic Jim! Of course you must go! England is waiting

for you! Think, Jim, what am I beside Her? She is looking for you, calling you. She is in danger. You can't fail her."

"There are heaps of others."

The words were just muttered. She hardly caught them. His lips were buried in her hair.

"And they are going," she whispered back, "all of them are going, all the men who *count*. You wouldn't stay, *you* wouldn't be one of the no-accounts."

"Suppose I come back . . . *blind*," his hoarse whisper was one of shaken horror.

"No matter. It will be for *England*. And I will wait on you hand and foot, and read to you and kiss you and sing to you."

"But not to see you . . . ever again," he pushed her out from him and so held her while his eyes travelled over her face, searchingly, hungrily. He wanted to stamp on his mind so as to carry with him everywhere, through shot and shell and down into the darkness of blindness or death, that sweet and lovely image.

She smiled back at him. "Darling, good-bye," she whispered, "we shall meet again. If

not here, in Heaven. Nothing will matter so long as we have each done all we could."

The rosy glow was fading. The sun was withdrawing his light and glory from the earth. The swiftly approaching violet shadows of the evening enfolded the lovers, and in them she heard his passionate good-bye, with his hot tears falling on her face.

It was the eve of both their birthdays, September 1st, 1914. He was twenty, and she was nineteen.

When the shadows had grown still deeper and had hidden finally from her long gaze, Jim's retreating figure going down away through the slender, feathery larch trees to the town, she went slowly back to the cottage, small and white, that nestled in the curve of the hill. Her eyes were clear; the great pain in her heart seemed so deep, so far down, it was below the level of any tears.

When she reached her home it was all astir, for her father also was "joining up," and some friends had come in to wish him luck. He was head gardener at a neighbouring big house, a

tall, strong, kindly man, who never held his grizzled head higher than when someone said he was old enough to let the young men go, and stay behind. He could "get out of it." "I don't want to get out of it," he had said simply, fixing the speaker with his brave, kind eye. "I want to fight."

That was the simple reason, the great grand reason why England won. Her men, the most of them, the best of them, *wanted to fight*. And as long as the world lasts, whatever pacts are made, and whatever phrases are coined, every game animal and every man and woman worthy of the name, will, when attacked, *want to fight*.

So the gardener Bell, of forty, joined up, and Jim Brown of twenty, and Rosa Bell was left in the cottage to take care of it and her younger sister Ella. There were no tears. Rosa's eyes were proud and glad. Her brain was only filled with one question—What can I do? Her whole heart panted with longing for work and self-sacrifice.

It was blazing, three o'clock of an August afternoon, and the white road through the valley gave back to the eye a pitiless and stony glare. The hedges on either side were coated with a peculiar yellowish dust; a heavy suffocating scent of sulphur hung in the stifling air which seemed throbbing and pulsating with the ring of hammer on steel, and the confused sounds of many workers working, which came from the huge munition works, the great camp in the valley well away from the town. Two tall chimneys gave out thick columns of brownish smoke, which seemed to hesitate a moment before loosening their tight convolutions, and then to roll slowly onwards, spreading in a sullen, ponderous way all over the valley to its furthest rim of hills.

A girl walked along this burning road with a slow and weary step, and as she came near a gate in the hedgerow, she turned aside to it, and when she reached it leaned hard on it and seemed to draw her breath with difficulty. Before her stretched a meadow, yellow in the sun-

shine, flecked with huge shadows as the trailing clouds of smoke passed over it, and through it wound a little green path, leading on through many a fence and stile up to the cool green slopes of the hills where the woods grew thick, and over them towered, rich in velvet turf and crowned by sweeping beech trees, the ancient camp that once had dominated the valley.

The girl's hot tired eyes looked longingly up the path. How she longed for the shade of the beeches! for the cool air that played with the dancing leaves on the summit of the camp! How strange to think that four years had gone by since she and Jim had walked up that path together one sunny afternoon, when the air had been clear as crystal, and only the birds' sweet notes had broken the golden silence, when there had been no munition camp in the valley, no smoke overhead, no thought of war in their minds. Four aching years, how they had limped away and were gone now for ever, lost in a great gulf of pain. Her father had been taken. He would never come back to the cottage; and Jim, would he ever come back? She

had never seen him since he left. He had been in Mesopotamia, he had been wounded, very ill. That was all she knew. His letters were few, with long intervals between them. Sometimes two or three came altogether. Sometimes not a line reached her for months. Yet her hope and her sense of duty never failed her. She had written to him regularly every week. All the rest of the time she had worked. She knew it was not her part to idly think of him, nor to spend her time in weeping for him. She knew she must work. And she had saved. She put everything away that she earned. She was saving for him. He might come back disabled, infirm, crippled, blinded. She must have money to provide for him if he needed. Food, wine, medicine, care, what might he not need? and what would be her intense joy to be able to give him not only the care of her hands, the devotion of her soul, but also luxuries, things that money could buy—the money she had earned?

Wherever the economy touched herself, she pinched and screwed. It was only Ella that

never suffered. She herself grew thinner, but Ella matured and bloomed into greater beauty every day. She had clothes and shoes and hats as she wanted them, but Rosa for herself could hardly bear to spend a penny of her precious hoard. The over-alls she was wearing were of the roughest, cheapest kind; her shoes were old and patched; her hat three years old. She did not care so long as the hoard grew and grew for him. When the call for the extra munitions came, when the nation awoke suddenly to the bitter need of her soldiers in the field, it was Rosa who begged to be given more and more work, and if the deadlier things to make were the more highly paid, she pleaded to be chosen for them. However painful, however dangerous, she could face them, as she would have faced death by snake-bite or any other poison—for him.

But now, as she leaned on the rail, she realised how great had been the price she had paid to win that little hoard. Her strength was gone. She felt frightened. Suppose after all when he returned, ill or helpless, she was not fit,

not able to nurse him, wait upon him? She must pull up a little. She must take a little more care. That was why she was leaving the camp so early this afternoon. She was going home to rest. She had fainted that morning at her work. So silly of her! She hated herself. Why, the war might go on for ages yet, and she must go on working to the very end just as Jim himself was doing. Her hero! She must be worthy of him. She must be more careful. She would go home and rest now, and after a long sleep she would be fit again. She turned from the gate and resumed her way, trying to press her steps, but her chest was strangely tight, she could hardly breathe. She walked more slowly, thinking. She *had* tried to be careful, but somehow she was afraid the poisonous fumes had got round the edge of the mask, or perhaps through the gloves into the pores of the skin. She looked at her hand in the sunlight. It was strangely yellow, and it had always been so white.

After a long, hot walk through the town, for

her home lay on the opposite side of it, she entered her cottage on the hill with tired feet. She almost stumbled on the threshold.

A young girl sprang up to greet her. "Oh, Rosa, how ill you look!" she exclaimed. "Come and sit down while I make you some tea. The kettle is just on the boil."

She led her sister to the old armchair by the window, where geraniums and muslin curtains fought with the sunlight, and put a pillow behind the bent and stooping shoulders, cramped by unaccustomed hours of toil. Then she bent over her with a lively smile. She was truly lovely, this girl, now nineteen; with all the wonder of colour in her flower-like face that Rosa had had, but joined with a regularity of feature, a perfection of contour that the elder girl had never possessed.

"I have a secret! Guess what it is!" she called in her clear merry voice, both hands now behind her back.

Rosa lifted her face, the insidious poisons had sucked out the rose colour from cheek and lip; it was dully, horribly yellow, stamped, al-

though quite young, with the ghastly colour of extreme old age. She made an effort to smile.

"Tell me," she whispered hoarsely.

"It's Jim!" cried the younger sister joyfully, "he's coming home. I have his telegram here, he's in London. What'll you give for it?" and she danced away and round the room holding up the telegram, her eyes full of mischief. She was so well and full of life. She had been so well looked after, so well nourished, so sheltered from overwork and care.

"I'll give you a kiss," answered Rosa, stretching out her hand. "Oh, let me have it! What does he say?"

"A kiss!" laughed the other. "Who'd want a kiss from you, you dear old yellow-face! Why, you look *poisonous!* Never mind, you shall have your telegram! He's *your* man! but I'm jolly glad he's come back, for now you'll leave off that beastly munition work!"

She flicked the telegram over to her sister and turned her attention to the kettle which was boiling over on the little stove. She did not mean to be unkind, she was only thought-

less, and spoke lightly without weighing words —just what came into her giddy little head.

Rosa caught the telegram in her trembling hands. She hardly heard her sister's remarks. Jim in England, London, coming home! The whole world seemed standing still as she read the wire. The amazing joy of it! The words danced before her eyes. "Back safe and sound. Coming to you to-morrow. Jim." She lay back in the chair panting. He was safe and well, and coming to her. The glorious luck of it all. How thankful she ought to be! How grateful! And it was just in time. She could not have held out much longer. Now she could rest a little. How pleased he would be when she told him all she had done. She would take him to the post office and draw out all that little hoard and press it into his own dear hands. Had he come back ill it would have been a necessity to him, since he was well it would be a joy. He should have it all.

"Here's your tea! Do take a drink and buck up a little! You look so bad."

She opened her eyes which had closed of

themselves as they so often did now without will of her own, and saw her sister standing, holding out a cup of tea. She took it and drank it eagerly.

“Thanks, I feel a lot better now. It’s done me good. Oh, Ella, isn’t it lovely to think we’ll have him back after all he’s gone through. We must straighten up the cottage, and we’ll give him father’s room. I expect he can stay a few days anyway. Oh, isn’t it just Heaven?”

She was speaking eagerly, excitedly, now. A flush burnt in her cheeks. Her soft dark eyes were full of fire.

“I expect you’ll be marrying soon,” Ella said slowly, “and then I’ll have to get out.”

“What an idea! Of course you won’t. You’ll stay with us just as long as ever you like, but you’ll be marrying yourself, Ella, pretty soon. You are just lovely—like a picture.”

“Do you think so?” queried Ella a little doubtfully, going to the mirror on the wall, a small, square mirror with green tissue-paper

twisted ornamentally round its narrow frame. It was not too small to give back perfectly the soft glowing image of her face, crowned with the silky darkness of her hair. She peered into it and noted the transparent depth of pearly whiteness in the smooth cheek with its wonderful wavering flush of delicate rose.

"My skin is just like yours was, isn't it?" she said contentedly, after a minute's survey. "I always thought you pretty before you went in for munish. I think it was a mistake you did that," she added, judicially.

"I . . . I thought it was right," faltered the elder girl, a little chill creeping over her, a little breath of some vague and distant fear. "Father had gone . . . given his life . . . Jim was there . . . so bad. They wanted the things so much . . . Jim told me we couldn't win, unless they had more. . . . Someone had to make them."

"Plenty of others to do it . . . ugly girls," returned Ella briefly.

"I didn't want you to have to work hard,

you were younger, and you see Jim might have come back ill or blind or . . . or . . . without limbs at all," she added in a lower tone.

"Good gracious, yes! but you'd never have wanted to marry him then!"

"Ella! of course I would! I'd have loved him more than ever, and you see all the money they gave me would have come in then so well for him."

"Well I know I wouldn't marry a helpless lump. He'd have to go to a hospital or something."

"Oh, don't! you hurt me!" and she covered her face with her hands. "My Jim in a hospital!"

"Well, there, it's all right. No need to bother about it now. Come and help me make things look a bit tidier."

For the rest of the day both girls were busy. There were so many delightful things to do, the dusting of shelves, the polishing of hardware, the making of the most comfortable bed in the world, the gathering of bunches of flow-

ers for every table, the hanging of clean white curtains in Jim's room, the exact arrangement of the best pillow in the best frilled pillow-case on which the hero would rest his handsome head!

Extremely tired but supremely happy, Rosa went to bed that night. The last thing, she looked into Jim's room. It was very neat, very clean, and full of the scent of flowers. A delightful smile played on her face. Passing the toilet glass she caught her own reflection. A little pang went through her. It was very yellow. She looked closer. The deadly stain had spread down the round neck, up to the roots of her hair, and the hair itself had a reddish, rusty look, different from the silky blackness of four years back. Her eyes took on a frightened questioning. Then she smiled.

"How silly I am! Of course Jim will love me all the better when he knows it was the work that did it," and she went away to happy dreams of the morrow.

The following day was suffocatingly hot, and the girls, in a state of nervous tension,

awaited the great event, finding still more work to do, and running to window or door every two or three minutes to look down the sunny garden and hillside to the road.

Rosa had been out many times with the sun hot on her bare head, and after all it was Ella, who, late in the afternoon, strolling down the garden path, first caught sight of Jim. Rosa, after a long watch at the gate had returned, and was sitting in the arm-chair when she first heard the beloved voice she had thirsted to hear for so many weary months.

“Rosa! darling! at last! How lovely you are!” The clear ringing tones came to her “lovelier than ever,” and then her sister’s voice with a little giggle in it.

“Shut up, you old donkey! I’m not Rosa. Don’t you remember me? You used to call me the kid. Rosa’s inside.”

They were now on the threshold. Rosa had sprung to her feet. She rushed forward, and her arms were about his neck.

“Oh, Jim! darling, darling Jim!”

The young man was laughing over his mis-

take. He held her close and kissed her two or three times. Then he held her out at arm's length from him just as he used to do in old times when he wanted to feast his eyes on her.

She looked back at him, adoringly. Oh, how handsome he was! so brown! but such a lovely, clear, bright tan, and he had grown so broad!

"I say, Rosa, old girl, what's come to you?" he asked in tones of concern. She saw his expression had changed. That little chill came again to her heart.

"Why, Jim, it's all the munish," broke in her lively sister, "Rosa's worked like a slave all the time you've been gone. She's been as good as gold and now she's the colour of it!" and she giggled as she did at everything. Why not? To temperaments like hers all life is one great joke.

"My poor old dear," ejaculated the man, drawing her close into his arms again. "Poor dear old girl," he repeated, kissing her hair. It was loving, he was kind, but in Rosa's breast sounded a death knell. To her woman's ear, so sensitive, so acute, so attuned to catch the

tones of love, the difference between his voice now and the triumphant rapture of his first exclamation, was quite clear.

“Lovelier than ever!” Oh, how it rang in her brain, and that was not for her now. It was for another, for the sister whose health and beauty she had fostered while she had given herself to the deadly sulphurous fumes.

She clung to him trembling, her face hidden on his breast, and he stood patting her shoulders gently and kindly, and looking across to where the soft lustre of Ella’s face glowed in the hot summer light.

“What made you work so hard, my dear?” he asked.

“I . . . I wanted the money for you. . . . I’ve been saving for you,” she murmured.

Then she raised her head suddenly and saw his eyes fixed on the girl by the window, and her whole heart and body grew cold as ice. She withdrew herself from his arms and sat down in the arm-chair to support her trembling frame.

“Ella, dear, leave Jim and me a little while.

We've so much to say to each other," she said.

"I want to hear Jim's news too," Ella remarked, reluctantly going to the door.

"You shall, later, he'll tell us that at supper. I only want to tell him more about myself. You know all that."

"Right oh! I'll be in the garden if you want me."

She flashed a brilliant smile at the young man and strolled out. Rosa turned to him. She felt very weak and nervous, and a little confused by Jim's slight air of dissatisfaction. But she must tell him all that her heart had been bursting with for so long; and all about the little hoard at the post office. She had so looked forward to this moment, but now, somehow, it was not what she had thought it would be. She talked to him, with his dear hand in hers. She told him all that it had been so impossible to express in her letters; she told him how she had thought of him, worshipped him, loved him, prayed for him, worked for him, saved for him. And he listened gravely with his eyes bent upon the floor. She remembered

how formerly they had never left her face while she talked to him. He was kind, he seemed grateful, but she felt there was no response. She was a creature pleading for her life, and she knew it. She talked on, and her voice was very sweet, so full of the accent of love, but she felt like a musician tapping a board instead of the speaking notes of an instrument. Something had come up between them, a wall, a partition she could not penetrate. All fire, all fervour, rapture and enthusiasm seemed to have gone out of him in that first exclamation. She could not win it back. At last she came to the disclosure of the amount of her little savings. It seemed very big to her. She had a note of triumph in her voice as she told him. He did not seem surprised, nor even very pleased. She put before him all her motives; all her fears; her great love spoke in every word. Then she waited for some response.

“It’s awfully good of you, old girl, but you needn’t have bothered, the Government’s bound to look after me, and I’m sorry you’ve messed up your face so,” that was all he said.

"Is it so very bad?" she said falteringly, putting up her hand to her thin cheek.

"Well, it is rather rotten," he replied, looking at her closely and then away again. "See how different your sister's is! You were the image of her when I left you," and he sighed.

Rosa was silent. The great, the awful, the crushing knowledge of having made a mistake in a vital matter, filtered, with its deadly hopelessness, slowly, into her brain. She had done wrong; she had failed.

There was a long, long silence between them.

She sat half dazed, with a feeling of misery she could hardly explain. After a time he got up and stretched himself.

"I'd like a turn in the garden," he said constrainedly. "You sit here and rest a little."

Rosa nodded with a faint smile, and watched him go out. Ella was in the garden. There are many cups of bitterness in life, and this girl, without philosophy, without education, knew that one was being held out to her now, and that she must drink it.

She sat perfectly motionless, her elbow on

the chair arm, her chin resting in her hand, her gaze fixed on the floor.

She was not only tender and loving, she was brave. She had the soul of a lioness, and she looked straight into the face of this great ruin she had brought into her life. She did not attempt to palliate it to herself. She had lost; lost everything; lost her health, lost her beauty, lost Jim. None of the things she had so dreaded had happened, he had not been killed, crippled, blinded. He had come back safe and well as she had so ceaselessly prayed, but she had lost him. It was so extraordinary she could hardly grasp it. Had he *only* loved her then for the fugitive blush of her cheek? It looked like it. And he? Had he come back most horribly disfigured she would only have loved him more. How she would have taken him into her arms and loved and honoured and treasured him the more for every scar, every hideous wound, sign of his courage and sacrifice. Ah, well, men were different. It was her fault. She should have known. She saw now that to be idle and selfish and worthless,

with a pink cheek and a bright lip, was better in a man's eyes than to be hard-working and self-sacrificing, if it meant a stain on the countenance! There were steps outside, they were passing the window. She sprang up and stood where she was in the middle of the room, and looked out. Yes, there they were together. How pleased he looked, how handsome, flushed, and animated; and her sister, how sweet her up-turned face as she walked beside him, hanging on his words. He was telling his adventures—"And then they put us on rafts . . ." she heard, the words floated in as they passed the window.

Rosa sat down again, and it seemed to her that iron hooks were being driven into her breast and sinking heavily through bone and flesh, down to her inmost soul.

Presently they came back laughing and talking, and it was time to get the evening meal. With a good deal of chaff and giggling and clatter of plates, the supper was laid, and the bread, the cheese, the ham, the precious bottles of beer, were all put out, the cold pie, the cakes;

and they all sat down. Jim, between the two girls, who both waited on him.

He told them fine stories of the crossing of rivers, the holding of bridges, the firing of the last shot, the failing ammunition; of the heat, of the flies, of the lack of water; and Rosa listened to it all in a dream. His voice was music to her, but now it seemed throbbing through empty chambers where her heart had been.

The meal passed over at last, and Jim, filling his pipe from the new little box Rosa had bought and put ready for him with loving care, suggested they should all go out for a walk.

"It'll be a jolly evening, and I'd like a turn through those old woods at the back where we used to go." He looked at Rosa as he spoke, and she might have been wrong, but she fancied from his eyes he did not want her much to come.

"I don't think I feel quite up to it," she said, a nervous shrinking filling her, and she saw at once a bright look of relief light up his eyes.

"You poor old dear, go up and get to bed

and to sleep and get rested. The kid and I'll take just a turn round. We won't be late." He came over to her and kissed her. Then in a mist, she saw her sister put on her hat, and they went out. There were the things standing on the table to be washed up. She did it mechanically, not realising what she did. When all were done and put away, she went up to the room the sisters shared, and fell upon the bed. She could not think. She was done.

A long time, it seemed, must have passed when she opened her eyes again. She did not know whether it was sleep or unconsciousness into which she had fallen. Night had come, and the moon was up, its light fell faintly into the room; a little air was blowing across it from the open casement. She wondered what had waked her. She put out her hand to her sister's place. It was empty. Then she heard voices. Jim was speaking. He must be standing below in the garden.

"It's no use, dear, I simply can't stand old yellowface, and as for marrying her, I couldn't do it. Now I'll tell you what we'll do.

We'll hook it quietly, you and I, and just leave her here so there'll be no fuss or bother. She'll be all right; she's got the cottage and a bit saved up, what she'd done for me. Now you be a good kid and do as I say. . . .” The voice trailed off, the speaker had passed on, and the light air changed its course, and there was silence.

Rosa sat up in the moonlight. A great pain was at her heart, tearing it to pieces. So that was her Jim! her hero! And she would have staked her life on his being true and great and fine. That agony of disillusionment, is there anything like it? It seemed to Rosa what she had suffered before at losing his love was nothing to what she suffered now in losing her faith. The awful pain was not in giving up her idol, but in seeing it shattered. So he did not love her, had never loved her, never cared for her, only for the colour in her cheek! Then a great fact leapt up before her like a light in darkness. If that were so, was his love worth anything? Did it matter whether one won it or lost it, possessed it or not? No. Then another thought

caught fire like a torch in the blackness of her misery. It was not this that she had worked and suffered for, not this light and worthless love. No, after all, it was for England, for her country, for all those fighting, of which Jim was but one. Whatever might have happened now, she did not regret what she had done. What was this fleeting thing, men's love? If she could have bought it again, had her beauty restored, and her labours blotted out, would she have done it? No, not now that she knew what that love was worth. A great agony came over her, out of her heart, and cramping all her limbs, and suddenly she realised that all things of earth were passing away for her. She did not exclaim, she did not call. Just staggering to her feet, she got a pencil and a slip of paper, wrote a couple of words, and then climbed back on to the bed, and stretched herself there.

The soul is a lonely thing. It lives alone. And in the last hour of life none can even approach near to it. Its own past actions rise then and stand round it on every side, guarding

its threshold. Rosa knew if the arms of her lover were round her, if her sister held her hand, her soul would still, preparing for its homeward flight, be utterly alone. She was not afraid. She needed no one. Even the pain seemed passing away. The walls of her narrow room seemed to fall and dissolve into lighted spaces, she heard the heavenly choir singing, and freed from all desire of this world, her bright and stainless spirit took its upward flight.

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Entering on tip-toe a little later, Ella stumbled at the bedside and put her hand, in the dark, on her sister's face.

She shrieked.

"Jim! Come here."

Jim hurried up from the lower room. "What's wrong?" he exclaimed, putting the match he held to the candle on the dressing-table. As the light flared up, he saw Ella standing over the form on the bed.

"She's dead! oh, Jim!"

The man approached and gazed into the

face. It was stone white now, the hated yellow tint hardly showed. The sweet and gentle lips were set almost in a smile. He nodded. He knew well the face of death.

“What’s this?” he muttered, drawing a slip of paper out from under her hand. He spread it flat, only two words were traced on it.

He read them out slowly.

“I forgive.”

MORE CRUEL THAN THE BEAST OF PREY

LILY had been brought up in an old cathedral town, and some of its quiet tranquillity seemed to have got into her blood, some of its stately dignity into her character. Her parents were dead, and she had lived under the care of an old unmarried aunt who owned "The Grange," a roomy secluded house surrounded by wildly lovely gardens, and sheltered by masses of walnut and lime trees. In these gardens, among lilies that were no fairer than herself, Lily grew to the age of seventeen. On her seventeenth birthday she was tall, slight without being thin, and exactly, in appearance, like her name. She had an exquisite carriage, full of grace and dignity, and moved as lightly as a lily sways in the wind. Her head was small and bore a crown of sunlit waving hair, her skin was warmly white as a lily seen in the noon-day, and her

eyes a beautiful lustrous blue. But above all the charm of her face or form was the magic of her voice; that wonderful voice that thrilled and drew the heart towards her. Such a sympathy dwelt in it, such a comprehensiveness as it seemed of all things; of the woe and suffering in the world, of the joys and the passions, the loves and griefs and tumult of the soul. It had every subtle inflexion in all its clear, pure tones. It was a perfect instrument of sound, rich and soft, disclosing and revealing the tender loving temperament that lay behind it. That voice was irresistible, animals were swayed by it instantly, the restive horse, the growling dog, the wildly frightened cat, all grew calm, the moment those sweet notes of Lily's voice fell upon their ears. The divine compassion of it, unlike most of the sounds of earth, changed their rage or fear into a startled wonder of silent listening.

In the dark and quiet house, of which she was the acting mistress, for her aunt was old and inactive, she moved like a radiant being, uncomplaining, happy, as the ray of sunshine

dances in the old lumber room. The servants were old and deaf, her aunt lived a life aloof and distant from her, and Lily lived in a world of her own. Splendidly educated by the best and highest teachers in literature and languages, in music and painting, and with a mind that absorbed easily every form of knowledge, wide fields of thought stood open to her, and over these her spirit took flight like a falcon. Overseeing domestic duties in the morning, driving to the shops in the afternoon with her aunt, sitting tranquilly in the long chair beneath the walnut in the evening, Lily's soul was wandering afar, through the Damascus Gate at Jerusalem, perhaps, or amongst the palms of some desert oasis, or with Ænone on Mount Ida, or "going up" with Xenophon, or accompanying Creusa in her flight from burning Troy.

She lived in a world of thought, of knowledge amongst great and heroic minds of the past, where nothing small or sordid ever came. And when she emerged from this inner life of hers, it was the animals who were her com-

panions, it was they that she studied, and with them she played. Flowers and trees, sunshine and sunsets she loved, everything that was sweet and good and beautiful, but the animals, who are all of these things, she loved most of all. Her pleasures were not the tea-parties, the tennis matches, the little dances, which the other girls of her age looked forward to, her dreams were not of lacey hats and rose-silk gowns. In the cramped drawing-room, surrounded by the venomous chatter of human beings, stabbed by their envious, hate-filled glances on her beauty, she felt wearied and bored, but in the garden watching the cooing pigeons courting their mates, or the Persian cat fondling its little ones, or racing Nelson, the great, glossy retriever, across the lawns, then she felt happy and at ease.

The song of the blackbird in the evening, when the sky grew red behind the lines, filled her with a joy she could not analyse nor explain, simply she sat there motionless, listening with all her soul to the exquisite melody pouring so easily from his little throat, and feeling

the peace of God which passeth all understanding, gathering her into itself.

The last Christmas before the War, her aunt had her nephew, Major Brandon, down to stay with them for a fortnight, and Lily met her cousin for the first time since she had left the schoolroom. He was a very handsome man, taken altogether, certainly the handsomest human being she had ever seen. He was tall, and his figure was beautiful in every line, quite as beautiful as the Persian cat she played with in the garden, and her glossy bay riding mare. Up till now she had thought all human beings rather ugly, ugly as they were stupid, with awkward shambling movements, compared with the lithe grace of animals and the swift inimitable flight of birds. All animals and birds were beautiful as they were all clever and sweet and loving. Human beings mostly were as dull and plain as they were spiteful and evil speaking, but Douglas Brandon was really a pleasure to gaze at, so full of strength and symmetry, and with great brown eyes as dark and clear as the eyes of an ox, and

straight noble features, and a quick warm flush under the clear skin of his cheek. They met at dinner. Lily, dressed in a straight white silk frock with a girdle of gold cord round her slender waist and a tiny gold chain about her throat looked exactly like a flower in its opening bloom, and Douglas, delighted with her beauty, gazed on her with fire steadily growing in the velvet darkness of his eyes. He laughed and talked, told stories, and laid himself out to amuse her and her aunt, exerted himself to be perfectly charming, and succeeded absolutely.

After dinner, when the curtains were drawn closely over the windows in the drawing-room, and the logs were blazing cheerily on the hearth, her aunt dozed in an armchair and Douglas drew his own near to Lily's and conversed in a soft undertone, and under pretence of telling her fortune took her little white petal of a hand and held it lovingly, deferentially in his, and at ten, when she went up to her topmost room amongst the swallows' nests and the climbing jessamine, at this season, empty

nests and bare wind-shaken boughs, she realised exactly that the incident she had so often watched from its first inception to its end in the animal world she loved, was taking place now in her own life.

The blue-grey Persian of infinite beauty and litheness had leapt over the fruit garden's high wall to woo the snow-white Persian, a darling of kittenhood that gambolled with the butterflies along the sunny, bricked paths, between walls of peach and plum. Instinctively she knew now that into the walled garden of her life had come—a mate.

She was amused, interested, pleased but not extremely so. She undressed quickly in the chill air, got into her little fluffy white bed, put her hand under her cheek and fell asleep, with only a passing thought of an eye, not quite so beautiful as the velvet darkness of the bovine eye, and of a figure not more graceful than a cat's. Love came to all. She slept tranquilly. She was not one to question the decrees of Nature and of Fate.

The next morning at breakfast, Douglas,

gazing at Lily, realised that if she had looked lovely last night, she looked lovelier still this morning behind the coffee-pot and silver kettle. Like most fair people she looked her best in the white light of early day. It showed the heavenly blue of the lustrous eyes whereas at night they looked black, and the untouched silky whiteness of her skin.

Her aunt did not appear at breakfast and the two young people talked gaily together, their conversation wandering over many grounds, and Lily, responsive but not assertive, rarely offering an opinion and listening intently to all he said never suggested for a moment to the not very observant male mind that she was judging him accurately and impartially and forming an imperishable and indestructible estimate of him.

Douglas had been at Eton, and from there had passed through Woolwich, to the Army. And the Army was not only his career, it was his life. He was an excellent officer. For the rest he was what is generally understood by an English gentleman. He knew nothing of mu-

sic and when Lily had offered last evening to sing and play for him he had said, "Oh no, let's talk," nothing of painting, sketching, sculpture or any of the arts, nothing of old-world history, his studies of the classics having been superseded by mathematics. Besides, the human mind retains in memory what it most loves, and since to Douglas, all the sublimity of ancient literature and philosophy, all the glorious sentiments of past ages, all the music of Pindar and all the wisdom of Plato, had always seemed "a precious lot of rot" he was not likely to have remembered much of it. Scenery, and beauty in anything except the female human being, he could not see. Imagination he had none, and he never thought.

He was a good polo player, a good pig-sticker, a good shot. He rode well and swam and sculled and liked eating and drinking and fighting and hunting and fishing.

All this came out quite simply and easily in their conversation, following on her soft remarks which covered deft inquiries. All was noted and swiftly engraved on the bright steel-

like tablets of her mind while the blue eyes beneath their curling lashes seemed to smile approval and encouragement after each damning statement that he made. On his side, he never troubled about Lily's thoughts or views. He supposed that like himself, she had not got any. He saw before him a creature who had youth and beauty—the only two things that men think they value. She was well bred, well brought up, of good birth. She had a charming manner and a lovely voice and he meant to marry her for the flame of passion scorched him from brow to heel like a great sword driven through his being. She had no money and he was glad. He wanted none. He had plenty and it always seemed to him a wife was easier to keep in order if she had nothing of her own. Of Lily's feelings he never thought. Whether he could make her happy, whether the life he had to offer would suit her, whether he was worthy of her, such considerations never came near him. His regard for her was exactly his regard for a glowing peach growing on a sunny sheltered wall and accidentally espied by him.

He would tear it down, set his strong white teeth in it and devour it. He didn't care about the peach except for the pleasure it gave him, and he felt to the girl exactly the same, only the peach did not have to be consulted before being eaten and Lily did. So in order to make sure of her consent to the process, he had to throw deference into his eyes and tones and would buy her goodwill with expensive presents and much flattery.

They finished their breakfast and went into the garden. It was quite wild and the roses were still blooming, a delight to Lily, but Douglas did not care for roses, nor trees, nor birds, nor anything to be found in the garden. He expressed surprise that there were no tennis courts, that was the only comment he made and then suggested a walk into town. Arrived there, Lily took him into the cathedral, to her a place of wonder, of divine peace, of ineffable charm and awe and mystery where the writing of the ages stands round one in solid pillar and carved capital. But Douglas knew nothing of architecture, nor of stained glass windows, and

saw nothing of mysticism or charm anywhere, so they left the sacred edifice just as one deep note from the organ went pealing through the arches.

“Oh, I say,” said Major Brandon hastily, “he is going to play, let’s get out,” and they passed through the ancient portals where the tooth of time and Horace’s “*edax imber*” had been so long at work and went and found a boot-shop where Brandon spent half an hour ordering some boots while Lily sat reading an illustrated paper in the front of the store where he had left her.

There was a little tilt of her eyelashes, a little curl of her lip, that was not brought there by the comic bits in the paper. They drove back to luncheon and after took a long walk together in the mild winter afternoon and Douglas looked extremely handsome, his cheeks flushed with exercise, and his great dark eyes bright and animated with passion as he walked beside her. He was so much handsomer outside than inside, that Lily almost wished he would walk in silence, instead of turning out

the inside of his character for her to see. She knew enough now and she ceased to elicit by soft phrases any further information.

When they had returned from their walk and separated, each to go to their room to dress for dinner, his comment to himself was, "We're getting along splendidly, the little witch is half in love already," and hers to herself was, "He can never enter into my inner world but perhaps for other things he might do."

On the last evening of his stay, their aunt retired earlier than usual leaving them sitting side by side before the fire. She told Lily not to stay up late but to come in and say "Good night" to her at half past ten on her way to bed. Then the door closed behind her and Brandon's arm went round Lily's delicate silk-clothed waist and his other hand seized hers and drew towards him, the shell-tinted fingers resting in her lap. "Darling, I love you so much. Will you come out to Egypt with me? I am ordered there in a month. We could be married in town and spend our honeymoon there. I know you would love Cairo and the life there."

He had no possible ground for supposing this, but it sounded well.

Lily sat quite still, looking into the fire. He waited. Then, as she had not drawn away from him or given any sign of aversion, he pulled her round to him and kissed her, kissed her on her pure white cheek, on her gentle mouth, on her brow and on her soft springy hair which felt like crinkled silk under his lips. To kiss her, after that fortnight spent with her, under the pressure of the rising tide of passion within him, rigorously kept under, was like drinking long draughts of cooled wine after a day's journey through the arid desert. Lily sank into his arms against his breast, just as the gathered rose sinks and yields under the hot hands that press it. Still the silence lasted, then he said, "Speak to me, darling! Tell me you love me and will marry me!" and he sat back flushed, animated, exceedingly handsome as nature only allows man to be in such moments.

Lily looked at him and her lips framed a sweet little half audible "Yes."

“Kiss me,” he commanded, and then to his vague surprise, the passive, silent, shy, half infantile creature before him seemed to pass through a subtle metamorphosis. Her eyes widened and grew full of fire, scarlet colour glowed in her lips. She lifted her slender arms and twined them passionately round his neck and kissed him over and over again, while he felt her heart beating and leaping against his breast. It was astonishing. He had somehow expected her to shrink from him and be timidly frightened rather than pleased at his caresses and quite incapable of returning them. This was bewildering but it was delightful too, intoxicating, enchanting. He showed none of the surprise he felt, did nothing to check that warm innocent ardour but welcomed her into his arms and revelled in her soft enthusiastic kisses.

Whatever his faults, the two patron deities of his life, the only gods he knew, Mars and Venus, had never any cause to complain of him. He was always ready and eager to respond to the call of either of them. He was

delightfully flattered and pleased by her enthusiasm, her sudden awakening into this vivid emotion under his kiss. He would have been less flattered and less pleased had he seen into the girl's mind and understood her attitude towards him. To her, this scene in the drawing-room was but the replica of those pictures she had often watched amongst the leaves in the garden. She was now the white kitten being caressed and courted by the noble Persian from the Abbey grounds, and though the marriage ceremony would be more formal and delayed, the feelings and motives that led up to it, were exactly the same. Although she would be taken to a sacred edifice and many religious words said over her and about their union, she knew very well that there would be nothing sacred about it. She knew this man had no real love or consideration for her, that if she lost those attributes which pleased him, he would not care a straw if she died in the gutter before his eyes. She knew that she was the fruit on the wall which he longed to gather and devour. For her own part, she knew that the world in

which she lived, filled with mystic music and the most elevated thoughts, with the songs of Pindar and the lofty ideals of Buddha, with glorious visions and vistas of unknown worlds, must ever be closed to him. And how could she love him in the sense that the soul loves, a man with an intelligence far below the guinea-pig's and with a delight in slaughter more cruel than the tiger's? No, the soul must stand aloof from such a union. But the wind that nature causes to blow across the world fertilising it from end to end, was driving these two together. Love, or rather this breath of desire that animates our dust, comes to all. Why should she not have her share though her soul dwelt in marble palaces alone, where the infidel's foot might never tread? She remembered the snow-white kitten under the sunny wall and she accepted Brandon's kisses and gave him back the most charming endearments, exquisite, dainty and innocent, copied from the feline blue-eyed fairy in the garden. When the first fervour had subsided, he drew out a sapphire ring and put it on her finger.

"You will marry me soon?" he asked again.

"If my aunt approves."

"You dear old-fashioned little prig," he returned laughing, "don't you know we've done with the age of 'ask Mama.' The old lady will have to approve. If not, we'll jolly well marry without her approval."

Lily's lip set, ever so slightly.

"Aunt Alicia has been very good to me. I would not do anything to grieve her."

"She'll approve all right," remarked the man lightly, "otherwise, why ask me down?"

"I will tell you to-morrow, and if she consents it's 'Yes,'" returned Lily. "Now, good night, dear darling," and she kissed him again on his charmingly cut, and perfectly turned mouth and then slid away from him, deaf to protestations, untwining herself from his clinging arms.

On her way upstairs she went into her aunt's room and found her, as she half expected, not in bed but sitting by the fire reading. She looked up as her niece entered, and Lily came in and took a chair opposite her.

"Douglas has asked me to marry him. Would you like me to?" she said simply.

Her aunt looked a little surprised. It was not surprise at the news but at the girl's way of communicating it.

"Dear child, it's a matter for yourself," she answered. "Do you love him?"

The girl's glorious radiant eyes fixed themselves on the kind old eyes opposite her.

Love! Love seemed so remote, so estranged, so incongruous, in connection with herself and Douglas.

"I like him to kiss me," she murmured at last, "but he doesn't admire the cathedral, nor care for animals, nor music, nor art, and he's forgotten even where Troy was." She stopped, but the inference: How can I *love* such a person? was quite clear.

Her aunt did not answer immediately. She gazed into the fire in silence. Then she said slowly like one remembering past things, "You like him to kiss you. Yes, that is one of their best uses. To kiss us, to work for us, to fight for us. That's what men are for. As long as

one expects nothing else from them, it's all right." She paused, then she added, "a man can never be a companion to a woman's soul. Sometimes I think they have no souls themselves and never must you think they can give you sympathy nor that they possess such things as honour or fidelity or truth where women are concerned. Men are selfish, stupid brutes, their public schools and colleges make them that. If *we* had the training of them, we would make them very different."

"Are they all as bad as Douglas?" queried Lily timidly. "He is the first I have seen, *close.*"

Alicia straightened herself in the chair, a look of animation lighted up her face, in the soft glow from the fire her fine features took on a youthful light.

"Lily, you know I was a beauty in past days. I travelled with my father, I saw the world and many many men. My first offer of marriage was made me at sixteen. I was not satisfied with the man. I waited for others thinking they would be different. I have had over three

hundred offers. Fifteen of them were in as many different languages. Do you know what I found? *They were all alike.* Superficially, yes, men differ, fundamentally no. Little things are different: colour of hair and eyes and skin; in essentials, there is not a hair's breadth of difference between one man and another. Take a man from the farthest ends of the earth and put him, side by side, with an English country gentleman. Below the surface they will be alike. Their proposals will be alike and made in the same way. Their insane jealousy, their untruthfulness, their lack of honour, their intense selfishness, their ineffable stupidity will be the same in every case."

Lily gazed at her aunt fascinated. She had never spoken to her so intimately before and the girl listened to her, awe-struck. She was not, evidently, the least bitter. She spoke as a professor expounding the nature and habits of an interesting natural history specimen.

"So, dear," Alicia continued, "if you like being kissed and must therefore marry, you may as well marry Douglas as any other. There is

no need for you to hurry. You will have lots and lots of offers as I have had, but what you are vaguely thinking of, a good, true, sympathetic man as intelligent as a woman or an animal, that you will never find."

"I see," return Lily with a sigh.

Alicia smiled at her. "Marry Douglas by all means if you like, only remember in dealing with him or any man, *expect nothing.*"

She rose and kissed her niece and said good night and Lily went slowly up to bed thinking over this good advice.

A month later they were married very solemnly with a very fine service and swore with the utmost gravity, a variety of absolutely impossible things, after the manner of human beings and then left to spend their honeymoon in Cairo.

The honeymoon was splendid, much better than most honeymoons which are frequently anything but honied. These two were both singularly gifted with good health and immensely pleased with each other in a physical sense. Therefore the idyll of the white kitten

and Persian cat was satisfactorily repeated and Lily found it all just as ecstatic as the white kitten had done. Murmurs of love and kisses are the most soothing drugs, and matters such as the situation of ancient Troy and the beauties of a cathedral were left in abeyance.

As nearly as possible with the end of the month came the end of the idyll. Brandon pale and fretful, told her one night that he should sleep in the dressing-room, he was dead tired, had a bad head and must get a good night's rest.

Lily acquiesced with exquisite sweetness and sympathy, and when the door of her room was shut and she was alone, she pushed open the wide casement and gazed out into the tropic splendour of the night. She did not regret his absence. She also was tired, and glad to be alone.

She recognised what had happened. She remembered that after a considerable time of regular visits the Persian cat had gone back to the Abbey and the little white kitten played alone by the wall. In course of time she had

multiplied herself with five little creatures of fairy loveliness and then in the spring Lily had seen her again with a mate, but this time it was one of a velvet blackness, and she was as gay and happy in his caresses as she had been with the Persian. It occurred to Lily now sitting alone in the fragrant darkness that as the history of their love had so closely followed so far the episode of the Persian cats, it was rather a pity it could not end in the same way. She rather wished there was an Abbey near by to which Major Brandon could retire, leaving her alone to the joys and cares of maternity and with the freedom, these once over, to join again in the laughing dancing world, to choose another mate another season. These thoughts chased through the girl's brain as she sat watching the stars wheel and flash in the purple sky above and the tiny white moths, existing but for an hour, flitting back and forth across her windowsill. But she knew such thoughts were vain. The wedding ceremony altered things. "Till death do us part" she repeated the words wonderingly to herself. Why on earth should

she live with and love and cleave to and honour and obey and nurse and cherish this boring man whom she had never seen until six weeks ago and who did not love her any more than he loved his soup at dinner?

The logic of the thing seemed to her absolutely preposterous and ridiculous. He was an absolute stranger to her heart and soul and brain, he did not know any of her thoughts, and would have been incapable of understanding them if he had. Well, she had never had much human companionship. She had always lived in that inner world of hers, that world of thought, philosophy, of ideas, her joys had always been in art, in study and in the beauty of nature and the companionship of animals, and her marriage had done this much for her, it had brought her to a new part of the world, to a place where skies were golden and the sunsets visions of glory where she could watch the dreaming Nile flow past its miraculous pink hills, under its waving palms. Whatever Brandon did or did not, was or was not, she could never be unhappy here. She leaned out

of her window to draw in the breath coming up from the gardens beneath. The breath of a myriad roses asleep under the stars. She stretched out her arms to the wondrous peace and fragrance and mysterious charm of the Eastern night and Egypt, centuries-old mother of mankind, took her and folded her to its bosom.

Cairo was very full that season when the Brandons were there and very gay, and Lily, by reason of course, of her youth and beauty and bridehood, sipped of the very cream of its pleasures and gaieties. Social life never attracted her, she hated the mockery of it and the selfish malice that underlay all the apparent friendliness, the venomous desire to wound, to hurt, to destroy the pleasure of each other that prompts all these senseless human beings, but she loved dancing. Music was the life of her soul and the physical expression of music, which is dancing, was a supreme ecstasy to her. There was a ball every night at Cairo and she went to them all. Brandon disliked music and could not dance, but there were plenty of men

to whom he could talk, pleasant side-rooms where one could play billiards, smoke, or read the latest papers, and various dainty curtained little dens where one could have unlimited drinks. So he did not object to accompanying Lily, and it seemed quite a reasonable thing for her to wish to dance. All officers' wives did. It was as much the way of the army wife to dance as of her husband to fight. Lily had but six simple evening dresses, and she wore them each in turn, and then began again. All the women and girls there, did their level best to make her uncomfortable by laughing at her "rotatory" method of changing her frocks, and by shrugging their shoulders as she passed their gorgeous toilettes in her simple wisps of black or white or pink. But Lily did not care. She knew she was beautiful, and saw that the men thought her so. She never retaliated, never uttered an unkind word, or let her lip curl at the fattest Jewess in the most outrageous gown. Neither did she envy the enormous wealth that was often displayed about her; nor did any jealousy of another girl's beauty nor of an-

other woman's diamonds come near her. She was one of those who are born full of the Grace of God, and her little feet trod on no one's heart, trampled on no one's feelings, as with an exquisite happiness, she danced away the hours of those brilliant nights.

One evening there was an unusually beautiful ball and fête given by one of the big hotels; the grounds of which were all illuminated, and the inner rooms decorated with palms and roses. Lily was there, wild with delighted animation, for Fate had sent her a partner whose step exactly suited hers, and the joy of the perfect dance is indescribable. He was an American, young and good-looking, a musician of great natural gifts and ear, and an enthusiastic dancer. To Lily, who had found hitherto her partners often spoiled the dances by want of skill, this man's art came as a revelation. His feet had a velvet touch on the floor, his embrace of her was so light she hardly felt it, yet the strength of it was so great that they seemed to turn and move as one. It was just the simple Austrian waltz that they were danc-

ing, but he danced with long steps taken extremely fast, so that they seemed to be flying rather than dancing. It seemed to Lily that an extraordinary force, partly thrown into herself, still partly outside, was lifting her up, bearing her round and round in those flying circles in which the earth seemed left behind, and like two swallows they skimmed through space. It was beautiful to do, and nearly as beautiful to watch. Little groups gathered here and there in the corner of the room to stand and watch them go by. Others' partners grew tired and stopped, sat down, or went out to the cool of the garden; these two, as long as the music continued, swept on in their airy flight.

When the band ceased, and only then, they stopped. He looked into the fair unflushed face of his partner; beyond the light in her eyes, and the bright glow in her lips, the dance had not affected her.

"That went all right?" he said gently.

"It was heaven," she answered simply, and he laughed.

"Come now, let me get you an ice or something outside. May we have the next together?"

"I would love to but I think I'm engaged."

They passed out of the ball-room, and he steered her through a side suite of rooms which was a quick way to the large buffet in a flower-girdled tent in the grounds.

As they passed through the last little room, which was dimly lighted by an Eastern stained-glass lamp swinging from above, Lily suddenly gave an exclamation. It was so sharp, though not loud, that her companion started.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing . . . come along," she laid her little snowflake of a hand on his arm, and nothing loath, the American hurried on with her to the outer air, where under a huge banyan tree he found her a chair, and then started off to the tent in quest of refreshments.

Lily leaned back against the tree and thought. What she had seen in the little room, was her husband sitting on a corner seat half concealed by heavy green curtains draped

across and further sheltered by a screen, and on his knee, her lips on his, the waitress at the bar where the iced drinks were served. She knew the woman well by sight, a common woman . . . not very pretty . . . such a woman! Surprise was her chief feeling.

The American came back with champagne and delicious ices, and they sat and sipped and rested in the cool, sweet, scented air.

"I'll tell you what we'll do. You are all engaged, and so am I, up to two o'clock, but as I meant to go home early I've nothing after two. There will be lots more dances from two till four. Let's stay till four and take them, if you haven't given them already," this from her partner as he gazed admiringly on the fair soft head, bare of all ornament except its own little crinkled waves.

Usually the Brandons left about two. She knew Douglas liked it better than staying, as she would have done, to the end, and faithfully at that hour she would seek the ante-room, where sometimes at the bar or asleep on a lounge, she would find her husband and say she

was ready. It struck her, however, to-night she would not go to the ante-rooms, and also that Major Brandon could possibly amuse himself to the later hour. She was always tireless at night and she could have danced, she felt, through eternal centuries.

"A good idea," she answered. "Come for me at two. The rooms will be more empty. We'll have a lovely free floor."

Many of the guests left at two. Lily, who had been dancing all the evening, had seen nothing of Douglas, and met the American coming to claim her with a smile.

They danced, and several other couples, enthusiasts like themselves, shared the floor with them. The rooms began to grow cool and empty; some lookers-on lounged in the corners. Lily danced on and on, intoxicated with the divine joy of speed, the magic of swift motion.

"It was heaven before: it's the seventh heaven now," she whispered, "that the crush is over."

Such hours in life seem very short. Four o'clock and the cold light of day seemed to

come almost immediately after two o'clock, and the music ceased and everything seemed suddenly to come to an end. Lily said "good night" to her partner after promising many dances together for all the future fêtes, and then turning to go to the dressing-room, found herself face to face with her husband.

"Oh, Douglas, there you are. I am so glad. I was just going to fetch my cloak."

"Yes, I should think it's about time," he returned in such a savage tone that she glanced at him in surprise. His face was black and scowling.

"I won't be a minute," she said, and disappeared.

Not a word did he utter on their homeward drive, and Lily sat back in a dream going over those exquisite last hours, and feeling the thrill of motion still in all her blood.

When they reached their own quarters, just as she was going to say "good night," he burst out:

"What do you mean by dancing all the evening with that American and staying there till

the end with all those fellows looking on?"

Lily gazed at him: quite at a loss to account for the turgid wrath of his face, the fury of his eyes.

"I am sorry if you wanted to come home earlier. I only danced the last dances with Mason. We were both engaged for all the early ones to other people," she answered gently.

"Making yourself the laughing stock of Cairo," he went on furiously, "and keeping me up to all hours! Why didn't you come to me at two o'clock as usual?"

Lily had naturally a good temper, but this attack upon her seemed so uncalled for that a spirit of indignation came into her words.

"I saw you in the grey room with the waitress on your knee, and I thought you did not want to be interrupted. That's why I didn't come," she answered.

She had hardly finished when Brandon sprang forward and caught her arm. He shook her till she was almost dazed.

"Don't answer me when I speak to you," he

said, in a voice of concentrated rage and exactly as if she had been a servant, "and remember this, what I do and what you do are two different things. I shall have any number of women that suits me, but I'll take damned good care you don't disgrace yourself. We go up to Wady Halfa to-morrow, and if I find you write to that fellow Mason, I'll blow his brains out."

Gripped by the arm in his savage fingers she glanced up at his distorted face bent over her. Curiosity as to the nature of this extraordinary beast that man proved himself to be, filled her rather than any fear. She had always heard that English gentlemen did not strike a woman, but she saw the impulse to strike her, alive in his face. She said nothing from sheer astonishment, and the next instant Brandon pushed her violently from him, down the two little steps that descended to her room from his, and banged the door behind her with a terrific crash. The push given her had sent her down the steps and onto her knees on the floor. She picked herself up instantly.

“And it is said that *women* are illogical!” she thought, crossing to her window and leaning her arms on the sill, and again Egypt took her to itself and soothed and comforted her.

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Wady Halfa pleased her immensely; that valley of deep grass set amongst the hills. Brandon liked being there because there was some sport in the country round. Also the hotel had an uncommonly good cuisine, and the quail there were the fattest in Egypt. The rooms, too, were cool and comfortable. Lily hardly noticed the rooms or the cuisine, but her whole soul went out to the garden: long and narrow, and ending in a wild shrubbery of green and sweet-scented things; bauble and mimosa, oleander and eucalyptus, poinsettia and rose-trees, rioted there together, under a roof of palms. On the first evening after arrival, Lily, having dressed quickly in her black chiffon evening-gown, and hurriedly twisted the golden coils of hair round her shapely head, went out down the narrow centre path to enjoy her new domain.

This would be her happy shrine of contentment where she would sit and muse and dream and dream, while Brandon drank and smoked at the club, went out quail shooting, played billiards, or cuddled his waitresses in quiet corners.

She had not spoken to him of her joy in Wady Halfa. She never spoke of anything she felt to him. It was no use. The idyll was completely finished as far as Lily was concerned. He had shaken the last life out of it the night of the dance. She regarded him now, as indeed, if the truth were fully known, a vast number of women do regard the men with whom they are associated, as simply a boring circumstance in her life, something to put up with, as one does with a cold. He was a damper on her happy spirits, a restraint on her innocent pleasures. She never knew at what moment he might fly into a senseless rage with her, and her cheeriest hours were when he departed to some of his own amusements and left her to herself. He had brought her to Egypt: that was his one saving grace for which she was

always grateful. As she walked this evening, the sky was red with the sunset fires, everything about her glowed in the softest pink, and she walked along lightly, charmed at the bamboo arches over the intersecting paths and the flight of the hoopoes through the oleander trees. Suddenly she paused, before her was a low archway in a thicket of bauble and rose. It was dark beyond, a green darkness. Before the leafy cave, only a few paces from her, in her path, standing with head erect and gently swaying tail, stood a magnificent lioness. Tawny sides, gold in the sunset light, open brow, where the hair grew short and thick and soft as velvet, great wide and kindly eyes, faced her as she paused.

“Oh, you beauty!” she said, in a murmur of love, and the words fell softly, in her magic voice, on the ears of the hesitating animal. “You perfect love, where have you come from?” and the lioness lowered her ears as a dog does at a sweet voice.

From between the oleander trees at the side came a sound of swishing leaves, and then the

round face of a grinning Arab boy appeared.

"Him very good lioness," he explained volubly. "Him pet of hotel, never hurt anyone."

Lily had hardly needed this reassurance, nor did the lioness pay any heed to the black boy's eulogies.

With velvet paws and sinuous motion she advanced to the girl's feet and there sat down, deliberately leaning her smooth heavy side and shoulder against Lily's knee, and putting up her head to be stroked as does the domestic cat. Lily bent over her, and gazed into those deep, yellow eyes: eyes where the red fires of savage jungle hate and jungle lusts, turn into such melting looks of love as she gazes on her cubs, or, as now, when under the electric spell of a really pure human soul.

The tale of Una and the lion, and of Androcles and the lion are true all the world over. Animals and man are of the same brotherhood. It is only the cruelty of man that has drawn a line between them. The animal's love for man is always there, his trust, his reverence, and the man who betrays that trust and is guilty of

cruelty to an animal, degrades himself below the least of them.

The black boy squatted on his heels, the tassel of his red fez swinging over his ear, and watched the beautiful English girl bend her golden head over *his* lioness, with contented black eyes. He fed the lioness and brought it water and dry leaves for its bed. In his own way he loved it, but he felt that the love Lily showed for it had greater force than his. It seemed to come from some great store within her of overwhelming power, and it did not surprise him that his lioness yielded to it, since he, too, felt he could sit there listening to those tones of love, indefinitely.

"To whom does she belong?" asked the girl of him, looking over the creature's head which rubbed gently against the silken chiffon folds of her gown.

"Him belong manager of hotel. Me kitchen boy; me feed lioness, me do everything, me take care lioness since so big," he put his hands out about a foot apart. "Him lioness brought here by one English officer, him here ever since."

"It's a beautiful creature, you must be proud of it."

"Me very proud," nodded the boy genially. "Me like lioness very much."

Further talk was cut short by the booming of the dinner gong coming down through the peace of the garden, and Lily, putting her hands round the animal's soft neck, kissed it between its eyes and went back quickly up the narrow path to the house.

She seldom spoke to Brandon about any of her own thoughts, plans, or interests, but she was so full of delight at her discovery of this new playmate that the confidence slipped out as it were, by accident.

"Douglas, I found such a lovely lioness in the garden," she said, as they began dinner.

Brandon looked up.

"A *what?*" he asked.

"A lioness, it belongs to the hotel. It's quite tame. It will be so nice to play with."

"Do you mean it's loose in the garden?"

"Yes, it was walking about. Oh," she added hastily, seeing where his thoughts were tending,

"it wouldn't do any harm. The boy who looks after it says it's been here since a cub."

"Most dangerous I should say," returned Brandon, going on with his soup, "to have it wandering about like that . . . a cub's all right, but as they grow up they get savage. I shall speak to the manager about it. It ought to be fastened up."

The girl bit her lips. She said no more. She devoutly hoped he would forget this as quickly as he generally did everything she said to him.

To have the darling creature chained up or put behind bars, as a result of her stupid tongue would be calamity indeed.

"One must always remember they are beasts of prey," the Major continued, "don't trust it."

"Very good," murmured Lily, and quickly asked him if it had been hot in the desert that day while he was shooting, and what luck the party had had.

That night Lily sat long at her window gazing across the tangle of beauty under the moon-

light, and to her joy caught a glimpse of a tawny form pacing majestically with silent footsteps, the stone-flagged paths between the rose-trees.

Some days passed. The Major forgot all about the lioness, as he never came into the garden, and the verandah where he smoked, drank, and slept, lay on the other side of the house.

The hotel was very empty just then as it was late in the season and most of the travellers had already come down from the Soudan and not many were passing up. Brandon, who never felt the heat, went out shooting most days, and Lily was quite content with all the treasures of the place, the baby hoopoe birds that played round the oleander, the palms and half ruined mosque of which she made a little gem of a water colour, and the enchanting lioness that followed her steps and lay beside her while she painted and to whom she read aloud the Arabic she was studying.

One evening Brandon came back late, he had missed his way and gone too far down a

gully, and to get back sooner to the house, he cut across a rough piece of ground that joined the lower end of the garden. A huge mass of bauble, bamboo, and oleander hid the garden, and just as he was passing this, following a narrow path that led up to the side of the hotel, he heard a sweet magic tone that could only be his wife's voice, come floating through the flowery barrier.

"Sa eedah aziz! Bukra, hena, saar sa'at," came the words softly to his ear, and then the only just audible sound of a soft kiss. Then silence.

Brandon stopped dumbfounded. The words were: "Good night, beloved; to-morrow, here at seven o'clock," and in his wife's voice. A kiss! An appointment for to-morrow with her beloved! So that was the charm of the garden! She speaking Arabic. Why, he never knew she could speak it! Then it must be a black! A black—his wife!

He stood there glaring, rooted to the spot. His thoughts, furious disconnected thoughts, dashed stinging through his brain. He gazed

at the leafy screen. No eye could penetrate it. He thought of calling to her, but by now she had doubtless sped back to the house, there to meet him with her innocent smile. He had his gun. Should he fire through the trees—was the miscreant black crouching somewhere there? Then he ground his teeth and tramped on ferociously to the hotel. “To-morrow at seven o’clock.” There seemed an added insult to his sense of injury, as those were the very words he had spoken this morning to Miss Evangeline Jinks who presided over the bar attached to the hotel, and whose somewhat thick fingers had fastened into his buttonhole the white camellia that still adorned his shooting coat. But he had another appointment now, and Miss Jinks would have to console herself with a subaltern. His plan was formed. He would leave the hotel at seven to-morrow as usual, and his wife, who doubtless had fixed her assignation for the time when she knew him always to be away, would go to her guilty tryst thinking he was well out of the way. But where he would go would be

the oleander thicket whence the enchanting love whisper had come. There he would confront the shameful pair, and his revolver would soon settle with the black. While Lily . . . Lily . . . he fumed and raged and could not settle what should be Lily's fate. He felt mad enough to shoot them both.

He reached the hotel in a black fury, which was not any abated by the sight of the cool and delicate image of his wife, seated waiting for him by the window. She had finished her painting of the little mosque, and was looking at it with that peace in the countenance that only comes in the contemplation of what the worker knows is perfect work.

She looked up, saw the flower in his coat, knew whose hand had put it there, saw the scowl on his face, reflected he was probably in one of "his rages," and forbore to speak. After a little smile of welcome, she let her eyes fall again on the infant creation of her brain.

Brandon passed through to his dressing-room, where she heard him banging and kicking things about, and cursing his Soudanese

attendant. He did not address her till dinner-time, and she kept silence, wondering why he looked so furious.

"Been out in the garden?" he said, presently.

"Yes, till it was time to dress for dinner."

"Anyone with you?"

"Not a soul," then, thinking that might sound like a complaint, she added, "I don't mind being alone, you know I never have, and I perfectly adore this place. I hope we shan't have to go for ages."

The very speech to confirm his monstrous suspicions.

"Are you studying Arabic?" was his next abrupt question.

"Yes," replied Lily, rather surprised that he should take the least interest in what she was doing, but quite ready to respond. "It's a wonderful, beautiful language. I've got some books and I am getting on quite well."

More and more incriminating. One always loves the language spoken by one's "beloved." Brandon scowled into his plate and made no reply but a churlish grunt.

The following day, towards the fated hour of seven, Miss Jinks in her little room above the bar in the annex to the hotel, was frizzing her rather dusty looking hair before her mirror, and fixing in her front teeth. Lily with her sketch-pad under one arm and an Arabic grammar in her hand, clothed in a cool white linen with a knot of white roses at her breast, was going slowly down the centre garden path, and Brandon with soundless rubber shoes on his feet and a newly cleaned and loaded revolver in his pocket was creeping round by a circuitous path, completely overhung with pomegranate and bamboo, which led, outside the garden, to the back of the oleander thicket. Arrived there, he crept in, parting with difficulty all the twining undergrowth of tropical plants, and took up a position behind a screen of shrubs, so thick that he felt sure he could not be seen, but between the leaves of which he could see out into the sunshine.

In front of the grove where he was, ran one of the narrow garden paths, winding from the hotel on his left hand, down to the jungle of

flowers and palm at the garden end. Directly opposite him was the great mass of bamboo and bauble behind which he had passed the previous evening.

Here he waited for Lily and his vengeance, and Miss Jinks waited vainly for him, in the bar.

The air was still extremely hot, yet at intervals a little breeze amongst the sweet-scented things on every side brought a hint of coolness. The sky stretched above a tranquil blue of the purity of a flawless sapphire. The coo of some doves came from the grove of palms, two crimson butterflies fluttered delicately above the path. A sense of repose and peace hovered over the garden, all was pleasing to the eye and ear, all nature seemed resting beneath a canopy of fragrance, awaiting the evening coolness. Only in the heart of the man in the thicket rioted the red thirst for murder and revenge. Lily came along the path; he could see her light gracious walk, and the lustrous eyes beneath their arching brows, glancing from side to side, apparently

drinking in all the beauty round her with delight. She was chanting softly to herself some little song, and her lips were parted and bright in their smiling curves. She came close past him and went a little way beyond. Confound it, where was she going? It was difficult to follow her now; the leaves were so thick at his side. Still he could see her back and shoulders and golden head. Suddenly his blood seemed to stand still in his veins. She was speaking.

“Oh, darling, here you are. I was afraid I should miss you in the thicket. How fine you look! how splendid!”

This in the loveliest voice surely that was ever heard out of Eden; tones so rich and soft and filled with the enthusiasm of love!

Brandon's blood now seemed to race on again, and boil and seeth with wrath. Red mists swam before his eyes. He dodged the branches this way and that, and vainly craned his neck. Where was the fellow? He could not see him though he could still the back of his wife's standing figure. She had been speak-

ing English now. Perhaps after all her lover was one of the officers stationed here. Could that fellow Mason . . . ? He clutched his revolver tightly and brought it into position, but he could not see where to aim, nor could he catch any reply to her greeting. He made an effort to part the branches and snapped one. He saw that Lily started and turned. Afraid that he had given warning of his presence and his quarry would escape, he thrust the barrel of the weapon through the leaves, and aiming in front of her, where he thought her lover must be standing, he fired.

Instantly, and blinded by rage and savage jealousy as he was, he fell back in horror, for the white clothed figure turned and threw up its arms as if to defend some object and ward off the blow.

“Oh, don’t shoot!” came her voice in an agonised cry, that changed to a moan of physical pain, and she sank down on the path, the shot buried in her breast.

Blindly, beside himself with he knew not what feelings, he burst forward through the

veils of clinging restraining creeper and network of plant and tree. He rushed forward to raise her. Then stopped short, glaring, petrified, knowledge breaking in with its fearful pitiless white light on his confused and staggered brain.

There, across the convulsed and bleeding body of his murdered wife, he met the upbraiding eyes of the beast of prey.

PLAYING THE GAME

HE sat in his log cabin reading her letter with knitted brows. It was such a dear sweet letter, so kind and loving, so sympathetic in all its wording, that it seemed strange and incongruous that the recipient should knit his brows over it. But he did, and when he had come to the end, he sighed heavily and gazed down on the floor, lost in apparently painful thought. He was a picturesque figure as he sat there leaning against his rough deal table with his elbow resting on it, and his well-shaped, bright, golden-brown head supported on his hand. He was tall, and his form had all that lean hard grace which comes from great strength and constant work, incessant, varied, and not of the hardest kind. Dressed as he was in long riding boots, blue jean trousers and shirt, leather belt round his slight and flexible waist, he looked a perfect figure to sketch or to paint or to weave a romance round. His

soft wide-brimmed grey felt hat, turned up at one side, itself suggestive of poetry, fiction, and heroic adventure, lay beside him on the table near to the fateful letter in the neat and delicate female hand.

There was nothing to disturb his long reverie. It was the middle of an Arizona summer afternoon, and here in the heart of the glorious forest, not less than seventy-five long miles away from the nearest little human settlement and post office, it can easily be imagined that silence deep and calm as the still water in a well, reigned supreme. The heat was great, but the quality of the air, four thousand feet above sea level, was so pure, thin, light, and dry, that it had no depressing nor enervating effect. It had still all the exhilarating power that the high elevation gave it. As one moved one felt neither clammy nor oppressed. There was a pleasant feeling of heat in the air, such as one experiences on putting the hand into a heated oven at home, that was all.

Great bands of yellow sunlight striped the floor of the cabin; a floor of perfect cleanliness,

made of neatly fitted boards resting upon logs; the one wide horizontal window stood open; so did the door, and both showed beyond a vista of delicate green. Green, green was everywhere like a great ocean in which the cabin floated as a boat. Greenness and silence for seventy-five miles in every direction.

Round the cabin walls, formed of log lying upon log, with moss deftly packed into the chinks between, hung pots and pans of every size and description, each clean and polished as a jewel, each hanging apparently in its place on its own appointed nail, each and every one testifying no less than the clean steel tools also hanging there, and the bright gaily painted almanack showing the day's date, to the industry and love of order of the owner.

Indeed for anyone lost and wandering in the endless beauty of that wondrous forest to stumble upon this hut and to be entertained by its master, Victor Grey, would be a surprising and pleasant experience he would not soon forget.

Log cabins are very generally dirty and un-

tidy places, their occupants often rough and disorderly, however hospital, and yet to a traveller starving for food and wearied to death of the eternal green glades for ever opening before him, these cabins seem havens of comfort and relief, and this one of Victor's, with its air of refined peace, its note of order and plenty, combined with thrift and sobriety, would seem to the foot-sore one, a magic palace of delight.

Through the golden stillness, a leaf cracked faintly under a light step outside.

Victor wheeled round in his chair, and then rose as he saw a trim young figure of a girl in the doorway.

"I came to bring you these few eggs, Mr. Grey," she said softly, stopping on the threshold and holding out a little basket in which half a dozen clear brown hens' eggs were nestling in some hay.

"How very kind of you! Do come in a moment," he answered, and put a chair for her beside his own.

The girl came in with a shy and timid but

pleased air. From their looks and manners, from the tone of their voices, from the gentleness of their pleased glances, it was quite obvious that these two were linked together by those first light subtle chains of love, delicate as the jessamine wreath or the daisy chain which Nature weaves and that man replaces later by ones of his own, more substantial but not more sweet.

She sat down and faced the bright radiance of the window: her cheeks were round and very soft and the pale pink colour of the manzanita which grew in its beautiful wild clumps, bearing its Dresden-china-like flowers just outside his door; her hair gathered back from her white forehead and tied with a blue ribbon, was of the deep rich tone of the chestnut, and golden lights sparkled all over it and in amongst its thick curling waves. Her eyes were large and dark, and looked out from dark arching brows as do those of the deer not yet accustomed to the brutality of man, with a tender enquiring innocence, confidence and awe mingling in their velvet depths. As she sat on the oak chair, her

form not heavy, but well developed, her limbs round, yet slight, her head well carried, her whole pose easy, yet alert, she conveyed the impression of great strength, great capacity for work, great fitness to bear with and go through successfully a hard and trying existence. The man looked down upon her with a tender gaze, it was a sort of enveloping glance that seemed to take in everything about her: her youth, her health, her vigour, her natural sunlit beauty, her coarse and simple, yet perfectly clean and tidy blue jean clothing.

Then he turned his eyes to the window, but not until with a swift passing scrutiny they had rested for a second on a framed photograph standing on his rude mantel-shelf. The face in it presented a striking contrast to the girl's in the oak chair. The pictured face was the most exquisite and ethereal one could well imagine, with that fairness and delicacy that the snowdrop and the anemone show, trembling on their stalk. It was the face, moreover, of one who has never known and could not stand manual work, and whose life was the intellec-

tual one of cities. Still more the photo revealed, for it showed a costly dress of lace and a jewelled spray in the beautiful wealth of golden hair. As far removed from each other as any two human beings could be in this world were the two girls, who, at that moment, one on the painted card, one in her living self, sat in Victor's cabin.

He took the chair beside her, and closed his great strong hand over her slim, supple, brown one.

"May! dear little May," he said softly.

The girl said nothing. They had never called each other by their Christian names. He had never spoken a word of love to her. She had felt instinctively, though he never talked of his affairs, that the face in the frame was the cause.

"I love you, May," he went on in the same soft undertone, which had a great seriousness in it, "and you love me, I know. You could not have been sweet and dear to me if you did not, and that is why I am talking to you like this to-day. I am going away to England, and

I want to tell you the truth before I go."

She looked up. "Why are you going?" she asked.

"I am going to get married and bring my wife out here with me."

"Ah!" he felt a shiver run through her. She sat back in the chair, drawn together suddenly, almost as if someone had pushed a dagger into her breast.

"All this time," he went on, "I have been engaged, and that has been why I have never spoken of love to you, and never come to your home as your father wished. One cannot altogether help one's feelings and thoughts, but one can command one's words and actions. You have guessed all this?"

"Yes," the girl whispered back, "the photograph?"

The man nodded.

"I am engaged to her. I fell very much in love with her three years ago, when she passed through here with a hunting party. That was before you and your father came to the clearing."

He paused for a moment, looking away from the girl, out through the window into its world of mysterious green beyond. He was recalling a vision of a lovely face that had looked in through that frame three years ago, of a silvery voice with its sweet delicate tones that had called to him for directions before its owner had swept onwards by the broad turfy track under the maze of interlacing boughs, which led to the strangers' camp, a little distance from his cabin.

"Do you love her still?" came the girl's pained voice at his side.

"Yes, I think I do," he answered. "But, oh! May, I see now the horrible mistake of it all. I love her, in a way, yes, as you and I, May, love the gorgeous planets that flash above us, over the corral at night. When she came here she threw enchantment over me. She was like a spirit dropped from another world. I looked upon her as something too wonderful to touch, almost to look upon, and then she loved me. Why, I can't think."

May looked up at him, her eyes resting

adoringly on his bright head, his noble features, the fine clear whiteness of his skin that no exposure could coarsen, and did not share his wonder in the least.

“Of course she would fall in love with you,” she retorted with an indignant little frown.

“I don’t know why she should,” he rejoined simply, “her own life was so brilliant, she had everything in it, but I felt she loved me, and when I asked her if she would marry me and accept this life, she said ‘Yes,’ because she loved me though she would hate the life, and I was so mad and foolish, I persisted in it all, and when she went away we made a definite solemn promise to each other that no distance, no length of time, only death should divide us.”

His voice sank. There was silence. The girl beside him sat still, numb and cold and sad, sick with apprehension and despair.

She had always loved him. Her heart had flown out to him, in spite of her strenuous efforts to restrain it, at their very first meeting

when she and her father had settled in the clearing three miles away, and he had come over and generously helped them with his own time and labour in setting up their simple house. But on her first visit to his cabin, when she had seen the lovely picture on his mantel-piece, she had determined to let no sign of love escape her. She had nobly tried to throw out of her heart the love that strove to take possession of it. But even so, he had guessed . . . he had known.

“Well, but . . . but . . . if you love her still, it’s all right?” she ventured to say at last, a bitterness she could not help in her tone.

“I loved her then, as a sort of enchantment, and I love her still as a glorious memory of that time, but in all these three years, you can understand, the magic has faded, and then, I see the fatal folly of it. She can do nothing. She has always been rich, waited on, accustomed to pleasure, to the gay brilliance of the cities. What will she do here? where one must work, everyone must work hard all day, where there

is nothing but just mere existence, the getting and preparing of food, eating and working and sleeping. She will be miserable here . . . grow to hate me as well as the life."

"I expect she'll learn to do things. She'll have to," remarked the girl sturdily, with a vicious little snap in her voice.

She knew what *she* could do, cook and bake and sew, wash and mangle, scrub and clean; cut wood and chop and saw, milk cows and harness horses, rise at sun-up and work till dark, and never know an ache or a pain nor a feeling of fatigue. She knew how perfectly happy she would be sharing this existence with him; his log cabin would be a palace to her, in which there were but light and joyous tasks, and she had no patience with the idea of this golden fairy who could wish for anything better or different.

"Well, there it is," he went on after a pause. "I have given my word of honour and I can't break it. I have hoped at times that she might change and tire, but she has not. She is true as steel."

"Why don't you write and ask her to release you, say you have changed?" broke in the girl eagerly, a great flame suddenly mounting in her dark brown eyes. "If you really have," she added a little petulantly.

"Darling," said the man suddenly, putting his arm round her waist, "you know I have. You know I love only you now, and I see we are so suited. I know I could make you happy. I love reality in you. I only love a vision, a dream in her, but don't you see I can't *ask* her. I *know* she would release me in a minute, I know she would hate and scorn to tie any man to her against his will. She is honour and greatness itself. She would do it. She would *able* me that I was free, but if she should not wish it, if she really loves me still, if she should be very unhappy! just think! How can I withdraw my word if she might suffer by it. Only a cad and a brute could do it."

"Well, I know some men just go away and marry someone else and never ask for release or even tell the girl they're engaged to. They just leave her to find it out."

An indignant flush swept across the fine face of the ranchman.

"She would forgive me, I know, even if I did that, but she would think me the most contemptible hound that ever lived. How could she help it? And I know I'd blow my brains out rather than so degrade myself. No, May, my family is an old one, and we've never lost our honour. *Noblesse oblige.*"

"What's that you said last?" said the girl, sharply looking up at him. She saw for the moment his eyes and thoughts were far away.

He started. "Eh? Oh, well, freely translated it means playing the game."

"I don't understand now," May returned pettishly, "what game?"

"The game of life. Well, it means that if you value your self-respect you have got to act in a certain way; that's all. You can't cheat and lie. Common worthless people can and do because they don't know any better."

There was a long tense silence. At last the girl broke it.

“Then it is to be good-bye for ever?” she said in a timid voice, her lip quivering.

He turned and took her wholly into his arms, and she laid her head down on his shoulder, crying passionately.

“Darling little May, yes, it must be. Your father was talking of going away, right out of these parts; you will go with him, go and forget me. Perhaps it would have been better if we had not talked like this, but somehow I thought you would rather know just what I felt. And we could not help each other seeing how we loved. Dear little May, don't cry so! You are so young, only sixteen, you will find someone who is free, and love him much more than me and be ever so happy, I know you will.” He stroked the soft mass of glinting hair that lay on her shoulders, and held her to him very gently, and she lay in his arms and cried and cried, till from fatigue, she could cry no more. He kissed her many times on her white soft brow and on her chestnut curls, feeling in those moments that duty was very bitter.

The sun sank to a crimson glory in the West, and the whole forest was lit up with a flood of red and gold as they left the cabin together, and almost in silence, and with slow feet and heavy hearts, they walked through the fairy glades back to her father's place.

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Four thousand miles away on the same afternoon in one of the drawing-rooms of Grosvenor Square, two girls sat talking across the silver and Dresden china of their little tea-table.

"I feel sometimes as if I couldn't do it, and yet I know I must. I can't write and say I won't come after all this time, and perhaps break his heart." The speaker lay back in her chair as if exhausted by some mental struggle. One arm in its exquisite embroidered muslin hung over the side, her head with its crown of fair burnished hair rested wearily on the silk cushion.

"But you don't know it would break his heart," remarked the other girl cheerfully, selecting a choice De Reszke from her little gold case. "Why don't you write and find out?"

"How can I?" responded the other reproachfully, turning to her companion her wide blue eyes, the same as looked from the framed card on Victor's mantel-piece. "The moment I even faintly hinted I wanted my freedom, he would release me at once, whatever it cost him. You don't know, Hilda, how good and fine he is. If it killed him, he would never complain or reproach me."

Hilda struck a match with an emphasis that somehow conveyed her disbelief in Victor's early demise. She only said, however, after a minute.

"Well, the alternative is to go out to the ranch, marry the divinely good man, and live happily ever after."

"I believe I could if it wasn't for Bertie," the other murmured disconsolately.

"Yes, there's Bertie," resumed Hilda, smoking with serene contentment and half closed eyes. "Now, Ada, how do you know that Bertie's heart won't break just as much as the other man's."

"It's altogether different," Ada answered.

“Bertie has his regiment and lives here in London where there are such heaps of distractions, you know life’s a whirl. Out there in the solitude and silence where a year may go by and you never hear another human voice, a dream, a hope, becomes so magnified, the mind must brood upon, cling to it, and if that dream is dispelled, there is nothing to take its place, no possible distractions nor solace. Only the same dreary round of work in absolute solitude.”

“How you *will* enjoy it!” returned Hilda. “I can see you in blue jean, in your dreary round of work, scrubbing, washing, cooking, sewing, I suppose. Victor out all day, riding after cattle, you in absolute solitude, but perhaps there’ll be some cheery infants clinging to the blue jean skirts, as you with your hair tightly screwed back and your sleeves rolled up, go to feed the little black pigs crowding round the door!”

“I don’t mind the pigs, they’ll be company anyway!” returned Ada, turning her golden head listlessly on the cushion. “You can be as

sarcastic as you like, Hilda, but you won't make me go back on my word and throw over a man who has been waiting for me and thinking of me for three years. However I hate it, I've got to go through with it now. It's only playing the game."

Hilda was silent. She let her eyes wander round the beautiful room so full of all the evidences of luxury and wealth, of the best that civilization can bring to the human beings. Her gaze rested on the grand piano that could give out such a glory of sound; on the almost priceless lilies and orchids, marvels of bloom and colour, on the tables; on the silk upholstered furniture which wooed one to rest in its depths of softness and ease; on the form of her friend clothed simply enough but in fabrics so light and soft that they were hardly felt.

Then as her reflective gaze swept round this home of beauty and ease, it caught the large picture hanging on the wall behind Ada's head. The portrait of one of her ancestors who had cheerfully laid down his life for his king in the Great Rebellion, and for five hundred years

not one of Ada's noble line had failed when duty called him, or withdrawn his plighted word; and neither would this girl disgrace her line she knew. Though she looked so fragile, and had been brought up in the softest luxury and ease, she was ready to go forward and accept the fate she had made for herself, to face hardship and die under it rather than speak one word which would have brought her release, because that one word seemed to her to bring dishonour too. And Hilda quite understood: in spite of her sarcasm and her teasing and her worldly wisdom, she understood.

She rose and went over to Ada's chair. She had thrown away her cigarette and was buttoning her glove.

"Well, dear, you said Bertie was to come at five, so I will go now. You would like to see him by yourself for the last time. When did you say Victor was coming over?"

"He will arrive in about three weeks."

"Then you'll marry and go out with him?"

"I suppose so."

Her face was very white, her eyes were

closed. Then suddenly she opened them and fixed them in a horrified clinging gaze on her friend's face.

"Oh! Hilda, it's dreadful! Not the man, Victor's all right. When you meet him, you'll see better how it's all happened, but the life, that awful ranch life, with never a note of music in it nor an intellectual idea! The monotony, the loneliness, the sordid incessant work! Work with no attainment in it, work that is no use, carries you nowhere, has no end! You work one day that you may exist to work the next."

"I know. It's frightful. I wish to heaven you had not bound yourself to the wretched man. He can't leave his old farm or whatever it is, I suppose?"

Ada shook her head.

"Everything he has, all his capital is in it, and I haven't much of my own, you know, and he wouldn't live on my money if I had."

"Wretched business! but if you love him, it mayn't be as bad as you think."

"I don't—not now. I love Bertie."

“Well really . . . I almost think . . .”

The other girl sprang up.

“Now you’re going to advise me again to break my word! It’s no good, Hilda! That would be worse than the other thing.”

Hilda looked at her and gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

“Well, so-long, dear. You’ll be at the Opera to-night?”

“Yes. I won’t have many more chances!”

Hilda went out, and going down the stairs, she just caught a glimpse of the handsome head of Captain Herbert Dennis, as the noiseless lift glided up past her to the drawing-room.

Ada was standing with her head bent down and her forehead resting on the mantel-piece when the young officer came in. She straightened herself immediately, and went forward with hand outstretched and a little smile. She belonged to the rank where everything, the deepest wounds, the most bitter enmity, the greatest agony, death itself, is met with that brave and charming smile.

“I am so glad you wanted to see me before

I started for Egypt," he said, clasping and holding her hand. "Your telephone message this morning bucked me up tremendously."

"I . . . I . . . felt I wanted to see you once more."

There was silence. The young man looked at her steadily. There was a great whiteness and a great pain in her face, the smile had died away. Then he came very close to her and took her hand again.

"Ada! dearest! Are you sorry I'm going?"

"I ought not to be sorry. I am going to be married very soon, and going away myself to Arizona." She hurried the words out and tried to turn away and withdraw her hand, but he would not let her.

"Yes, I knew you were engaged, and that's why I've never told you, but you knew, you guessed, didn't you, how I love you. Oh! Ada, I'd give up my life if you could come with me now; is it possible? Do you love me? Tell me, you must tell me!" He threw his arms round her, and caught her chin in his hand, turning her averted face up to his, so that

he could look down into her eyes. They were full of desperate tears, but in their swimming depths he read his answer.

"Come, come, come with me!" he whispered, kissing her cold white face and quivering lips. "Don't let anything come between us. All this time I've said nothing because I did not know if you cared, but I loved you the moment I saw you, that first night we danced. We'll be married directly . . . to-morrow . . . and go to Egypt together."

As soon as she could she struggled out of his arms and sat down on a little chair near her, covering her face with both hands and sobbing, not loudly, but as if her whole body would break to pieces.

He sank on his knees by the chair and put his arms round her.

"Why shouldn't we?" he murmured.

At last she regained her voice. She sat up and looked at him.

"Three years ago I promised to marry this man in Arizona, and he has waited all that time

for me. Now he is coming over for me. I can't break my word, can I?"

The man grew very pale, too. He did not answer, and Ada went on.

"Suppose it was your case. Suppose you'd been engaged three years, and the girl loved you and had written you every week, would you throw her over just because you had met someone else you loved better?"

Bertie got up and paced up and down the long room in silence, frowning.

"Men do, and girls too, every day," he muttered after a minute, "but somehow I think I'd hate myself rather if I did."

"Well, I feel just the same."

There was another long silence. The girl sat white and still in her chair. The passionate weeping and feeling of rebellion was over. She was quiet now. She knew there was no way out. The man paced restlessly up and down, staring at the carpet. What he was feeling was this great truth that to act like a coward or a cad you have got to be one all

through. For the naturally noble to be led into a dishonourable act for any reason whatever is fatal. Before his eyes swam a picture of a fellow officer lying dying from his own revolver shot, in their tent in the Soudan. This man, overcome by some nervous crisis in a skirmish had turned and fled from the enemy, leaving his friends in the lurch. He had come back, explained, been exonerated by them, but that night he had shot himself in his tent. His last words sounded in Bertie's ears: "It's no good, if you want to act like a cad you must *be* a cad. I wasn't, I'm not, so good-bye, old man."

He had not forgotten that, and now in all the stress and strain of his passion, in the whirl of joy that swept over him at knowing definitely that she loved him, this scene and those words came back to him insistently, and the great truth that it is better to die than to live dishonoured stood between him and his great desire. He felt, instinctively, there would be no happiness for them with this spectre of a broken word between them.

He went over to her suddenly, lifted her wholly off the chair and into his arms, and pressed her hard to his breast.

“Good-bye, girlie, my own brave dearest dear. I’ll never love anybody as I love you. I’ll think of you all my life. Good-bye.”

Then he was gone. She made no effort to speak, to return his caress. She was numb, sinking down slowly through an icy well of despair to which there seemed no end.

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About two months later, on a night splendid with stars and glittering with frost, a wagon with two horses and containing two occupants was rolling steadily along the red road that runs from Flagstaff to Phoenix, passing through hundreds of miles of glorious forest land. And about this Arizona forest there is nothing of deadliness, nor terror, nor gloom, such as is hid in many a tropical forest. It is full of sweet-scented sunshine and light air. The trees stand apart so that the laughing blue overhead is rarely out of one’s sight. The soil

is light and dry and fine, there are no tangled creepers lying in wait for the foot; the undergrowth is simply great bushes of the manzanita, a lovely flowering shrub, and clumps of the wild azalea. There are no swamps, no treacherous marshy land, no layers of rotting vegetation, nothing to depress the mind or poison the blood. The air circulates freely between golden cedar and lofty pine, spreading beech and oak and giant red-wood tree. Laughing and gushing streamlets, sparkling in their gravel bed, flow through it. Bright blue jays scream and chatter overhead. There are open sunny spaces. The whole breath of the forest is life and health, the whole spirit of it gaiety and joy. The bright clear air sparkles like a yellow diamond through the golden days, air so fine and dry that nothing seems to corrupt in it, hardly to decay, and at night when the temperature sinks suddenly from seventy-five degrees to thirty-two degrees, and the brooks coat quickly over with ice, the breeze comes to one's lips bringing the exhilaration of ice cool wine. The wagon

rolled on easily, the sound of its wheels distinct on the frosted road, past the little clearing where for a short time a house had been, past the old cattle corral where Victor had formerly penned his cattle at the round-up, through a seemingly endless avenue of enormous firs, and then under the fire and flash and radiance of the stars, pulled up at Victor's cabin. He sprang to the ground.

"Here we are at last. I expect you're tired to death?" he said, pulling back the canvas flap and disclosing Ada sitting inside, wrapped in her long fur cloak.

"Not a bit," came her clear, dainty voice. "I've enjoyed every bit of it! What a wonder this forest is! It strikes me as more beautiful than ever."

Victor did not reply: he was busy with straps and flaps, making a way for her to descend, but a little flush of pride burnt on his cheek. He loved this land and home he had chosen; loved to hear it admired. He lifted her down gently, and then turned to unfasten the door. It stood ajar. Victor pushed it open hur-

riedly, and an exclamation of dismay, of grief, broke from him. Ada went to his side.

“What is it?”

“Some boys have been along and broken in. I expect they have taken everything,” he answered, getting out a box of matches and striking a light. A lamp was on the table just at his hand. He lighted and turned up the wick. The light drew up well and showed a scene of desolation. Revellers had been there evidently, supping, drinking, smoking, and when they had partaken of this free hospitality, had cleared out, leaving their host hours of work to put things again in order.

Victor looked round the place with a groan. He had left it all so perfect, knowing his bride was returning with him. Fire laid ready to kindle; wood neatly stacked by the stove; tins of canned food with tin opener ranged on the shelf; floor of the whiteness of marble; lamps, tools, utensils, all sparkling with brightness; kettle and pannikin and frying pan clean and ready to fill and pop on the fire. In such a climate as this where there is no damp, dust,

rust, mildew or moth to corrupt and spoil, a cabin will remain spotless and clean, unattended to for many months. But by ill chance, one in a thousand, some of the boys on a tear had passed by and camped here, that was evident.

Ada stood for a moment in the centre and stared about her, not recognising the place. Victor's cabin as she had seen it, and remembered it, had been an immaculate picture of order and peace. This place was filthy, the floor stained everywhere with tobacco juice, the stove dirty and burnt out; a pile of unwashed tin plates and cups thrown down beside it. Cases of provisions had been dragged out of the orderly cupboards against the wall, broken open, and their contents hurriedly gone through, and much of it left strewn on the floor. The table was covered with a litter of dirty plates and knives and greasy paper. In the middle lay a leaf torn from a pocket book, on which were scrawled a few words. Victor picked it up and read: "Thanks for a precious good time, old boy. Will give you the same if

you're lost round Tiller's ranch on the burnt oak trail. Two of the boys."

Victor put it down with an exclamation of angry disgust.

"Never mind, Vic," Ada said. "We can put it all straight in no time. I'll light the fire while you look after the horses. They must be cold out there."

It was cold. The liquid in a glass on the table was frozen hard.

"Can you really?" he answered, looking at her doubtfully. A wonderfully beautiful and regal figure she looked standing there with her soft plumed hat nearly touching the rafters, and the fur of her costly coat shining in the lamplight.

"Of course. I suppose it's the custom of the country to break into your neighbour's hut for anything you want?"

"Yes," he replied. "We all do it. I don't mind that, but they should leave things straight and clean when they go."

"They'd never seen such order as yours, I expect," she said, laughing. "They would not

know how to put it back, or perhaps they resented it."

She passed into the other room to lay her cloak down, but stopped on the threshold in dismay. Here the confusion and disorder was more apparent even than in the sitting-room. The bed had evidently been lain upon by someone too tired or too drunk to remove his boots; clothes had been taken out of cupboards and thrown about. The jug on the washing stand had been filled and left with water in it, which, freezing, had broken the china to pieces; in the basin stood dirty frozen water; on the towels half-washed hands had been dried, leaving their imprint on them, the soap was black.

Ada said nothing however to Victor. She hastily hung her coat on a hook in the wall, and then returned, closing the door after her. She heard him outside talking to the horses and pushing the wagon into its place. Very quick and light in her movements, she went down on her knees before the stove and raked it clear of all the ash. She had never seen a stove like this before, and never laid or lighted a fire in

her life, but she had all that general intelligence which belongs to a well-developed brain, and all the grit of the true aristocrat who is never seen to better advantage than when plunged suddenly into novel and trying situations. The stove was cleaned and the paper from the table put in, but there was no wood anywhere. She pulled open a little cupboard by the stove. A chopper lay there amongst some chips, all that was left of Victor's neat store. She took the chopper and went out. There were some bigger logs still untouched in the lean-to outside. With great care, for she was a little afraid of the chopper, and there was only starlight to work by, she chopped up one of the logs and brought back an armful of wood to the cabin. She filled the stove carefully, and after putting the match to it, was rewarded by its cheerful crackling. Then she peered into the large iron kettle; its lid was missing, and a little stale and rusty coloured water was frozen at the bottom of it. She looked round: where was the water? She thought she had seen a stream somewhere near the cabin, years

ago, but she did not remember exactly. She must go and look. She went out with the heavy iron kettle, and walked round the hut. She could hear Victor still moving about in the stable with the horses. She knew he would not be content until he had rubbed them down and fed them.

The starry splendour of the night seemed to speak to her, give her great pleasure, and in spite of the icy air on her coatless body, and the weight of the two gallon kettle, and the need for speed, she could not help pausing and looking up to it. This beauty all round her, pressing in upon her, would be the solace and comfort she foresaw of her distasteful existence. She looked up, and a calm seemed to fall upon her, a joyous calm. Then she hastened on. In the summer the streams are easy to find, their sweet chatter and light trickling laughter as they run can be heard long before the banks are reached, and lead one to them, but now, in winter, frozen over and asleep, they make no sign. She went all round the cabin; then at a little distance in the starlight, to which

her eyes were growing accustomed, she made out a long line of white through the trees, and ran towards it.

When she reached the edge, she saw it was no easy task to fill the kettle. She wished she had brought something as a dipper. There it lay beneath her, the stream, solidly covered with ice. The bank was only a few feet high, but very steep, frozen also, glistening and hard.

She knelt down, and with the kettle at arm's length she could touch the ice. It broke after many blows: she drew the kettle up with a little water in and washed it out as well as she could. It was cold with freezing ground and air and water, but she seemed literally burning with anxiety to do the work and do it well. With soft slim fingers and a dry leaf, she scrubbed out the kettle, rinsed it, and then started to fill it. The stream was running rapidly beneath the ice, and showed clear and dark with the stars mirrored in it. The kettle filled as she sank it into the well she had made, but when she attempted to pull it up to her level on the bank, she found two gallons of water hard to

handle; as it swung up towards her under her persistent effort, the edge of the bank on which she was kneeling gave way, and she fell sideways down into the icy water. The shock and the cold almost took her breath away, but she gave no sound, only clutched on to the kettle more tightly still, refilled it, and with it scrambled up the broken side of the bank. Her feet and clothes were wet, but she was unhurt, and getting up instantly, she ran like the wind back to the cabin.

Victor was still away. She set the kettle on the stove, found the lid in the litter on the table, put it on, and then proceeded to clear up. Moving very swiftly, and with her quick brain at work all the time, she soon had made great progress, and when Victor stood on the threshold he saw something like comfort again restored. The stove was well alight, the kettle singing, the table cleared, and two clean cups and saucers and plates set out upon it. He smiled, and a feeling of surprise came over him. Even May could not have been quicker or done better.

She made no remark about herself, nor spoke of her fall, her chilled limbs, or damp clothes. The plain serge travelling frock she wore showed no damage in the dull light of an uncleaned lamp.

“Where do you keep your tea?” she asked brightly as the kettle boiled.

“In the left hand corner cupboard if they’ve left us any,” he answered. He sat down for a moment in the chair she had cleared for him. He suddenly felt very tired, nearly forty miles continuous driving, and then the unharnessing and rubbing down of the horses, and then hauling in and stacking up in order all their luggage and the contents of the wagon, had left him glad of a moment’s rest.

Ada went to the cupboard and opened it. There were many things in it. Victor’s more personal belongings, which by him were kept neatly in their respective places, but this nook had been overhauled by the marauders and left like the rest of the place in confusion. A work-box with stout thread and buttons and reels in it jostled against a writing-pad and

some packets of envelopes, a bottle of ink and a roll of jean stood in front of the tea-can. Ada lifted them out, then the can; as she did so a photograph that had been hastily pushed in behind it fell forward, and she picked it up. In a large writing that she could not help reading in the first glance, was written: "With love from your little May. Good-bye, darling," and the dates of the month and year followed, the date of Victor's last letter to herself saying he was coming home. Mechanically she turned it over, and the sixteen-year-old face of May looked up at her from the card. Obeying the physical feeling which made her limbs seem to sink under her, she sat down on the floor with the card in one hand and the tea-can in the other. Only a word is necessary, a look, a sigh to those whose brains are keen, and a whole history is revealed. Ada, crushed and silent, sitting on the floor, forgot Victor, forgot the cabin, forgot everything near her. With a rebound, rapid and violent, her mind sprang back to an image she had resolutely forced from her ever since her marriage.

She was in Bertie's arms; she was back with him. She was going to Egypt to the life she loved of brilliance, of change, of travel, of fun, of adventure, the life of an officer's wife.

The kettle boiled so furiously and began to splutter so viciously on the stove that Victor sprang up and lifted it to one side.

"Have you found the tea?" he called out. Then as no answer came he looked round and saw her sitting in a little huddled heap before the cupboard.

"Why, dear, what's the matter?" he said concernedly, going over to her. Then he saw: the card lay in her lap: her eyes were fixed on something far beyond his cabin walls.

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry you should have seen that," he said, and lifted her up bodily and brought her over to the stove and set her in his chair. He realised instantly that to her fine perception all was clear. There was no possibility of deception or excuse.

"Give it to me. Let me tear it up."

He took the card from her nerveless hand

and tore it into minute pieces, opened the door of the stove, and thrust them in.

“Don’t think of it,” he said, bending over and kissing her. “It’s all over. You and I have set our feet on the trail now, and we are going to travel it together.”

She had watched him tear up and burn the card in passive silence. She accepted his caress passively, almost unconscious of it. She was stupefied by the intensity of the blow. After a minute she got up and stood beside him. Never had she seemed so lovely, he thought. It was the magic vision that had looked in at his window and thrown enchantment over him three years before. Her face was white, her eyes strangely dilated, the pale gold of her silky hair beneath her little travelling hat gleamed in the lamp rays.

“Tell me, Victor,” she said after a minute, and her voice was quite calm. “Did you love that girl and want to marry her?”

“I did. Yes,” he answered simply. There was a force emanating from her that simply

tore the straight truth from him. He could not hesitate, nor evade, nor prevaricate, even had he wished to.

“Why did you not write and tell me?”

“Because I knew you would have released me at once, and I thought it was not playing the game to ask you.”

“I would have released you *gladly*.” The last word came from her as a cry of physical pain, and it startled the man and brought a sudden fear with it. He looked at her quickly.

“Did you *want* to be free?” he asked.

“Yes, a thousand times yes!” Her tone was so bitter, so sharp with the intensity of the pain she was suffering, it seemed to strike him as a blow.

She saw the red colour leap into his face. Then he turned and sat down by the table and put his head in his hands. “God in Heaven,” it was a sort of unconscious groan that broke from him. Then there was silence in the freezing cabin as each one of them stared into the face of their future.

So it hadn't been necessary after all! this

great sacrifice! That was what she was thinking as her ice cold feet seemed to freeze to the floor, as her eyes rested on the cramped space round her, as her ears noted the deadly stillness without, the silence of her living tomb. So he had not been longing for her but hating to part with that little girl of the photo. So had she sent the words she feared would hurt him so much he would have been infinitely rejoiced! Oh, the pain, the agony of it, and the humiliation, that deadly wound to our vanity at finding we have over-valued self. And then all slipped from her, swept away by the tide of longing for her vanished happiness. As in a vision she saw herself in Egypt. It was a ball such as is held there nightly. She saw herself gliding with light steps over the satin-like floor, the strain of music lifting her soul to the heights, as the notes floated on the warm rose-scented air. She heard the laughter and the comments on her beauty, she felt the soft folds of her silken dress; then she was in the gay supper-room, friendly faces laughed round her; the lights were soft and many coloured, the little

table by the flowers was before her, Bertie was there; his eyes smiled his admiration as he poured into her delicate crystal glass the yellow sparkling wine. She was radiant, happy, admired, beloved, clothed in beautiful things, taking part in an exquisite pageant of sunlighted beauty and love.

And she had given this all up for nothing, for a man who didn't want her, but wanted somebody else!

Then slowly she came out of her dream. The wretched constrained little interior, the aching cold, the stiffness of her tired limbs, the image of the man sitting by the table with bowed head, became realities again. He had made the sacrifice too: there was an infinite bitterness in that thought, but the bitterness even had a soft edge to it. He had kept faith as she had. They had both made a mistake, and they both suffered, but they had kept their honour, the only thing worth keeping after all, the only thing to keep fast hold of in this shifting, swaying, uncertain, transient, misty

thing we know as life, the only thing that matters.

She moved towards him. She put her hand on his shoulder, and then her lips to his ear.

“Victor, we see now it has all been a mistake. But we did it for the best. Perhaps we each over-valued ourselves. Anyway we thought we were playing the game, and all we can do now is to play it to the end. I’m ready.”

He raised his head with a great sob and drew her into his arms. As their wounded hearts beat one against the other with throbs of disappointment, disillusionment, bitterness and pain, some happiness, some joy and pride mingled with all the anguish. Each knew the other had kept faith at any cost. Each heart knew the other had stood the test and been found pure gold.

THE BUTTERFLIES' DANCE

GOLDEN silence brooded over the summit of the Umbrail Pass, sunlight, silence, and infinite peace rested there. The heat was intense, and nowhere was the slightest fleck or hint of shade. From the golden soil of the pass to the deep, brilliant, unfathomable blue of the sky above, there was nothing but a glory of all pervading glittering light.

Not the faintest breeze stirred the hot, light air, not the softest little whisper of sound disturbed that unutterable silence; not the rustle of a tree, not the tinkle of a brook, not the note of a bird.

There are no trees, brooks, nor birds anywhere within many miles, yet Beauty has her home here, and Venus her attendants, for on the ground lies a magic carpet more gorgeous than any from Turkey or Bagdad; a carpet of vivid and dazzling circles of colour, blue and mauve and violet, crimson, scarlet and rose,

orange and amber and purple and yellow ; none of the circles run into each other, only fit closely. They are cushiony to the touch and intoxicating to the scent, for they are flowers, stalkless, leafless flowers growing close to, or rather flat upon the earth, compact masses of gloriously coloured, sweet perfumed bloom, and over this marvel of vivid colour and exquisite design danced and floated and hovered, thousands upon thousands up to uncounted millions of rainbow hued butterflies.

Up and down, up and down, swayed without ceasing the radiant cloud, as the butterflies, "set to partners," whirled and wheeled and hovered, fluttered and floated and sank and rose in their never-ending dance.

Oh, those butterflies of the Umbrail Pass, chosen children of God to carry a message of joy to the eye of the beholder! Who can be sad looking at them dancing, radiantly clothed in the sun, to a rhythm of their own? Little brown wings like velvet, striped with scarlet, large blue wings like silk starred with two dark blue eyes, lemon coloured wings barred with

black, orange coloured wings tipped with flame! Some were deep blue with delicate green circles on their wings, others were orange embroidered with scarlet, and not the least lovely were those absolutely and purely white that fluttered like falling flakes of snow which never fell. Then there were clear bright yellow ones, and small delicate blue ones of the most heavenly azure, as if they were pieces of the dome of sky itself: and each was perfect, in the zenith of its beauty, each tiny feather was smooth, unruffled, each brilliant wing-tip clean-cut and shapely. There had been no rain nor wind to roughen their glossy gay plumage. They seemed miraculous in their finished completeness and splendour, such butterflies as might float over the Elysian fields. Sometimes they would rise altogether, forming a wonderful spiral of whirling colour, then, high up, they would spread out fan-like, flame coloured orange and gold against the blue, circle softly over the brilliant blooms beneath them, and then gently flutter together, to rise in their dazzling column upward again.

As the butterflies danced on in their silent, beautiful, mystic dance, symbolising the immortal hope and joy of the world, a human being toiled wearily up the broad white dust-laden road that winds between the flower-cushioned slopes to the top of the pass. It was a man, tall and handsome, one of Nature's favourites on whom she had showered her richest gifts, beauty and liveness and strength, grace in the limbs, rich dark colour in hair and eye, and bright intellect behind the broad forehead. Yet he walked heavily as one in chains, and his eyes were bent on the blinding road instead of on the glory of the sunlit scene.

Count Arese d'Aledo, owner of a palace in Rome and another on the Arno, with horses and jewels and other earthly toys, courted and fêted and flattered, was sick with utter misery and desolation of soul, while the butterflies, who owned nothing but their painted wings, floated on the scented crystal air in an ecstasy of joy. They had the Empire of Freedom and the Sun.

After a weary climb, long because made with

such laboured steps, Arese reached the summit of the pass, and there fell rather than sat down on a slab of rock jutting from the mountain side. Under the rock and all round it nestled the pillows of Alpine flowers, brilliant pink and blue, tiny and exquisite blossoms in miniature, and far above the rock stretched the sky of dazzling lapis lazuli, and close above it hovered the radiant cloud of dancing shining wings.

The man, blind to everything, collapsed upon the rock and buried his face in his hands. Fatigue ached all through him. Italians do not care greatly for walking. Arese had never gone so far on foot in his life. He had hardly ever been out at this glorious hour of noon, the sun's grand reception time when he holds full court, before. Arese was generally in bed at noon. Electric and moonlight were more familiar to him than the light of the sun, and the heat of steam-pipes and charcoal than its heat. Mountains, flowers, blue sky, and the scorching kiss of the sun were practically unknown to him, though he lived in a land of

them. The cool shaded street where his palace stood, its dark richly furnished rooms, the gay crowded lighted gambling halls, the dainty silk-shrouded boudoirs of women, these were the places where his days and nights were passed.

Presently pain and fatigue subsided somewhat within him, and he raised his head and looked dazedly about him. He had started to walk to the top of the pass, and he supposed he had done so, but it seemed now that his long weary climb had brought him into another world. How intensely hot it was! yet it seemed a life-giving, not a destructive heat; all distress was dying out of his limbs; the pure clean air filling his lungs seemed pouring energy through his frame, bracing him. He began to know that he was hungry, and he felt in his pocket for the parcel containing his luncheon. His hand touched something small and cold, and he drew it out and looked at it in the sunshine: a little dark blue bottle with corrugated sides and a red label. In it was a tiny quantity of prussic acid, which is one of the

low, dark, easily swinging doors in the beautiful walls of the world through which one can step swiftly into the . . . What? which lies outside. Arese gazed at it with frowning brows. Down there in the dark cities, in the shade of palaces he had mortgaged, surrounded by erstwhile smiling friends now turned into scowling creditors, stifled by debt, and deserted by the women who had helped to lead him into it, this bottle had seemed to him the only means of rescue and of help. Now on the top of this glorious pass with its masses of incense breathing flowers, its laughing sky, its golden silence, and its troupes of painted butterflies, the bottle looked quite different, and he slipped it into his breast pocket with a sigh that had a dismissive sound, and put his hand again into his side pocket.

This time he drew out a large flat flask of golden Falernian wine, which glowed like a topaz in the sun. "Ha! ha! this is better!" he thought, and took a long draught from it; a draught of that same rich wonderful wine which Horace drank of old, and that he was

accustomed to seal up in cool jars in his cellar and write odes about.

Arese drank now and was much refreshed, and attacked with good appetite his roll and meat sandwiches, and after every crumb had been disposed of, he drank again, and then sat gazing reflectively at the flask and its contents sparkling in the sun. After all, why leave a world in such a hurry which had in it old Falerian such as that, and skies so blue and air so keen and dry and sweet? And when one was young with every limb so strong? Those women whose desertion had gone to his heart, why mourn for them? There were women in every corner of the world who would love him even though very poor, while his hair was black and his teeth white. Life was a gamble anyway, one never knew what was coming. He was young, why should he not wait to see the end of the game. Soon the end must come in any event. Death, the owner of Life's great gambling saloon, would come and turn off all the brilliant lights and stop the players. Why not wait till then? Arese stretched himself

luxuriously on his rock in the sun, and gazed up at the butterflies gently floating and swaying above him. How happy they were! Palaces were nothing to them, nor mortgages, nor gambling debts, nor false human friends, and as he sat gazing at them, to his poetic fancy they suddenly seemed to find voices and sing to him.

“We are the messengers of Hope. We are the children of realised dreams. Hope on, hope always. None can tell what the future holds. We were captives in bondage. We were grubs on the earth. We dwelt on the dark soil under the cabbage leaves. We saw the brilliant butterflies above us, but we were deaf, we could not hear what they told us. Birds ate us; they were flies who came and stung us in every one of our joints, then carried us away in helpless agony to their nests, there to lay eggs in our paralysed bodies, and the young when they hatched out ate us alive. Our life was passed in terror, in darkness, in toil. We could not understand, but we endured patiently, we hoped there might be some-

thing good ahead. Then came the end, we had toiled and crawled but we were so weary we could do not more. We wove our little shroud, and wrapped ourselves in it in an obscure corner and lay down to die, submissive, uncomplaining, patient. Heat struck at us and cold, and we ached with cramping pains we could not understand. Then one day there was a report like thunder, our bonds grew loose, our shroud fell, we broke out dressed in dazzling splendour, and on our glorious wings floated upwards to the sky in ecstasy. 'This was what we had waited for! Our dreams were true! Our hope was realised. Nothing now but to dance and rejoice, to love, and to sip nectar, to whirl and wheel in the blue spaces of the sky. Hope on! through life, through death, hope on.'

Arese seemed to hear them singing this quite distinctly as his eyes followed their soft smooth movements, and with a sudden re-birth of life-desire in his soul, he rejected definitely the idea of self-destruction with which he had started out from his home; seeking a place where he

would die unknown, perhaps unrecognised, merely some poor tramping stranger who had met his end by accident amongst the steep rocks of a mountain pass. Everything was different now. The new world he had found on the top of the pass, full of these beautiful denizens, had transformed him.

After all, debts could be paid, mortgages lifted, new loves found. The magic of life, the philosopher's stone that turns all it touches into gold, was work, and that lay within everyone's powers. Everyone was good for something. Some to rule a state, others to mend its roads, and the world had room for each and everyone, a measure of joy like a drink of Falernian was there for all who would work, and the blue sky and the clear air, the top of the pass, and the dance of the butterflies, was a free gift to all. He would work, and he knew how; he had powers in his brain long unused, but now they should be brought out. He had written a poem he remembered, just a light sparkling poem that had come into his head at a banquet. A friend had sent it to a

journal, and some time after, when Arese had entirely forgotten it, he had received a cheque in return. In those days the sum had seemed so small that he had been only amused, and in light-hearted derision had twirled it into a spill and lighted his cigarette with it! Arese's cheeks flamed for a moment as he recalled this now. No matter! those days were dead. This hour on the pass had shown him himself and life as he had never seen them before. Now he would work, and if he could only attain to a vine-clad hut, with a crust a day, still he would be patient and await

Arese had just got to this point in his reflections when the gritty sharp sound of a turning wheel caught his ear. He sat up and looked down the slope of the pass.

Coming up slowly he saw the bright bay of a horse drawing a carriage with two occupants. English evidently, a tall slim military looking man with grey hair, and a girl whose lovely, glowing face he could just see under her large white hat. She was all in white, soft and filmy like a cloud about her, which formed such a,

contrast to her jet black hair, glossy and blue-shaded like an Italian's, and her eyes were large and midnight-dark, unfathomably lovely as an Italian girl's might be. But the complexion was different from the olive-tinted skin of the South. Its tint was pure white, exquisitely white with the pale pink flush of the English wild-rose on the cheeks and a sweet light carmine on the gentle lips. Arese drew in his breath sharply, and he felt an enthusiastic fervour of devotion rush through him for such a delicate charming flower of girlhood. How he could worship such a sweet creature, he was grateful even for the joy of seeing her pass by.

The carriage, surrounded by a coloured cloud of butterflies, that, tame and inquisitive, had danced out to meet it, crawled up very slowly till it reached the flat on the crown of the pass, and here the coachman drew the horse to a halt and turned in his seat to address the travellers.

Arese next saw him jump down and lead the horse to the inside edge where he could browse comfortably on the short bushes grow-

ing amongst the rocks. The next minute the girl had opened the door and got out; she then stood leaning on the carriage side and talking to her companion. After a little discussion the man inside settled himself apparently to a quiet sleep, stretching himself out in the carriage and opening an umbrella as a screen against the sun. The girl arranged this, closed the door, went to the horse's head and patted its neck, and then went slowly down over the side of the road down the steep flower-covered slope of the mountain.

She did not see Arese, as a jutting piece of rock sheltered his motionless figure. Singing softly to herself she went down among the gorgeous hued blossoms, and was lost to his view. The coachman had disappeared, seeking a shelter for a siesta amongst the rocks: the man left in the carriage seemed to have fallen asleep, and the horse browsed quietly at the road's edge.

Arese, alert and attentive, open-eyed and interested, watched and listened.

The golden silence that had been interrupted

fell again on the pass. There was only the clear soft notes of the girl's singing voice as she went further and further down, wandering from flower to flower, and the clop clop of the browsing horse.

Arese lighted a cigarette and watched its smoke dreamily. He would much have liked to follow the lovely Signorina and help her in her search for bouquets, but he knew the English were strict and formal in their ways, and he would gain nothing but her adverse opinion of him if he dared address her. Suddenly a rasping sound of grating pebbles drew his eyes back to the horse, and he was horrified to see the animal had strayed all across the wide road to the outer edge, and was now busily cropping flowers and grass indiscriminately and in careless eagerness, getting his feet over the side on to the steep slope. The carriage wobbled and dragged along after him; its occupant inside apparently asleep and unconscious of his danger.

Arese sprang to his feet. Before the thing happened he saw distinctly it was going to hap-

pen. The horse, intrigued by a gorgeous cushion of yellow a little further down the slope, reached his long neck out for it, stepping down the stony incline; one of the fore-wheels of the carriage was already over the edge, the carriage tilted and lurched.

The next instant Arese was flying in lightning leaps along the precarious edge to the horse's head. He had no thought of his own danger. He did not even think of the lovely fairy whom he was serving. He was just obeying that great fiery impulse to save, to help, to rescue, which lives in every noble soul, and distinguishes it from the base.

There was a furious scramble of horse's hoofs as the frightened animal plunged on the edge, trying to regain its foothold. Arese at its head, with magnificent strength and courage, struggled with his firm slim hands to support and push it back on to the path. His feet were digging into the treacherous slope as he stood below, holding back and up with all his force, horse and vehicle. But the weight was too great, the balance irretrievably gone; he

knew he could not avert the disaster, only perhaps by the sacrifice of self, lessen it.

“Jump out, sir,” he called desperately to the Englishman, whose face, unwhitened and unafraid, looked out at him over the front of the carriage.

The door on the far side of the vehicle swung open, the man sprang out on to the road in safety in just that second while Arese summoning all his strength held back the plunging animal and tilting carriage.

Then a great roar went up of falling stone and rock, and a cloud of white dust shot into the air as the edge gave way beneath the rocking weight and Arese, horse and carriage, all inextricably mixed together, rolled headlong over and down the precipitous flower-decked slope. A cry of great anguish went up. It came to Arese's ears amongst all the thunder of his fall. He guessed it was the girl's. She had seen his act. Good. If this were death he was quite content to have met it in her service. That was his last thought. Then darkness and quiet.

Julia, the flowers falling from her hands, rushed straight up the breast of the mountain, to the shelf of green turf, on which a tangled mass of harness, shafts, and overturned carriage were lying. The horse by a miracle had broken loose, rolled freely to a lower table-land, and now having picked himself up, was blithely resuming his interrupted grazing.

Her father and the coachman she saw above her finding their way down cautiously to the wreck, but she reached it first.

With small white hands, delicate as the butterfly's wing, she wrenched aside the obscuring carriage hood, pushed back a broken wheel, and with arms made strong by the fire of emotion, drew gently out the slight passive form that lay so terribly still now after that tense glorious moment of struggle on the pass. Her face was as white as the one beneath her, her eyes torn wide open, black with distress and pain.

"Is he dead?" she murmured. "Oh, God, not that." She put her hand on his chest. She could feel no heart-beat. She looked at

the long scarlet line by the temple, but that was not deep, surely? With deft fingers she loosened the dark blue tie that seemed keeping the collar of his soft shirt too tight, and freed his throat. What a round splendid throat it was, and then seating herself on the mountain side drew his head on to her lap. She smoothed the dark hair, all covered with white and stony dust, from the brow, and gazed down into the marble-like face with a passionate tenderness.

In a few moments her father was beside her; the old coachman behind him expostulating, self-accusing, mumbling.

“I hope he is not killed, Ju, is he? Such a splendid thing to do! I shall never forgive myself if it’s cost him his life.”

Julia looked up piteously.

“I don’t know. . . . I think he must be . . . it was so awful. . . . I saw him fall. Isn’t it a beautiful face? I never saw anyone so handsome.”

The old soldier, Colonel of an Indian regiment, nodded.

"Fine fellow, and had the pluck of the devil!" He went down on his knees and put his flask of brandy to the white lips. A very little seemed to go down the throat, but Arese neither sighed nor moved.

"I do believe he is dead," said Julia, beginning to sob, and her hot tears fell on the unconscious face.

The Colonel shook his head, and looked at it doubtfully.

"You know, Ju, I don't like the idea of carrying him up the mountain to the road ourselves, even if we could do it. There may be fractures somewhere, and if we double him up at all, or move him awkwardly we shall make them much worse. Regular stretcher bearers and stretcher and ambulance is what we want. Had we better send Beppo down after them?"

"Beppo is no good. He won't get enough attention paid him. You had better go yourself."

"But my Italian's so poor. I'm helpless without you."

"Well, you had better *both* go. Beppo can do the talking."

"But what about you . . . left alone?"

"I shall be all right. I would like to stay with him. Think what he has done for us," and a fresh rain of tears broke from her pain-filled eyes.

Now it was about this time that consciousness came back to Arese; at first only a dim glimmer, not enough to make him move nor open his eyes, but he heard their voices and what they were arranging, faintly, and rather as if in a dream; then slowly memory revived, helped by their words. He recalled the accident, yes, and the fall, and then he realised his present position; his head was on her lap, that darling girl! Soft white clouds seemed round him, and a warm smooth palm brushed back his hair. Such delicious sensation bathed his whole frame, he thought he had better not come to just yet. Where could he be better off? Whatever they did with him, he wished for nothing better than this, to lie clasped in those sweet arms, soothed, caressed, cried over. He

lay perfectly still and listened. From their talk he guessed they thought him dead or dying. He knew he was not dead, nor did he think himself to be very seriously injured. He was in no pain except what might come from bruises and scratches, and every fibre of his body seemed conscious and thrilling to her touch. Arese heard them planning that the two men should walk down to the town and get help, and Julia should meantime stay watching him on the mountain side. This he thought was a perfect arrangement.

Presently the talk ceased, and the scratching and rattling of small stones told him the men were climbing back to the pass.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then her sweet low voice, like the voice of a dove on its nest, broke out again.

"Oh, darling, darling. I hope you haven't died for us, you beautiful darling, I shall never be happy again if you have!" and the soft palm caressed his forehead.

Arese felt an intolerable longing to open his eyes and gaze on the lovely face he knew was

just above his own, but like Orpheus bringing Eurydice back from Hades, he knew that if he allowed himself that gaze, Julia, though she might not fade from his eyes, would certainly raise up instantly the cold barrier of conventionality between them, now so completely thrown down by emotion, anxiety, admiration, and his own helplessness and apparent death-like unconsciousness. So he steadily remained with eyes closed, while every other sense in him was drowned in delight at her touch, her voice, her proximity, at the adoring, admiring tenderness she poured over him.

It was very lonely and quiet on the mountain side. Golden silence had resumed its sway, and the butterflies in their gentle clouds, not a bit afraid of these human beings who kept so still, alighted on them in fluttering numbers, and floated round and over them, and settled on the ground near them. The girl would not let them alight on his face, but gently waved them from it. Arese would not have minded if they had. He loved those butterflies. Had they not saved him in his darkest

hour whispered to him of Hope and Life's great promise, nearly always fulfilled for those who work and wait. But for them he might have crept through the low dark door, but they had coaxed him to wait, and brought him to this, to the paradise of her enclosing arms. As he lay there he was profoundly thankful for two things, that he had followed the butterflies' advice, and that he had learnt English. How he had hated his English lesson as a boy, but his mother had wished him to learn, and to please that beautiful and adored mother he had learnt. He had struggled through that barbarous tongue as he might have done through rocks and boulders. And now! in her voice, it was like the whispers of Heaven, and the murmur of a thousand harps and flutes.

"Oh, darling, if you would *only* open your eyes!"

How Arese longed to! But no. This was too divine to spoil. Arese knew that to a conscious man no woman will ever really open her heart. Never does he see more than the mere presentment of her soul. There are veils there

of reserve, of reticence, of illusion that she will never divest herself of. But here in his death-like trance, with closed physical eyes, he was beholding in all its splendour, in all its glory, without a veil between, the tender, passionate, shining female soul. He was awed, overwhelmed; the sincerity of her pity, her tenderness, her grief vibrated all through her and through him. The glow of her passionate admiration for him seemed to pour along his veins its soft white fire. Never had he been so loved; in all the arms he had lain, none had clasped him quite like this. Mere physical ecstasy of the senses was something quite apart, infinitely inferior. In this, he felt her soul and being had entered, every emotion in her heart and brain had been roused, enthusiasm for his deed, tenderest pity for his fate, passionate admiration for his face, all these, like volcanic streams set loose by seismic shock, he realised were rushing through her pure and lovely frame and passing, all mingled in one great electric wave, from her to him. Had he indeed been dead, Arese thought, that living wave of love must have

brought him back on its crest, to the world.

Never again he knew, though they might marry and have children, would any embrace be quite so close in its truest sense, as this. Physical intimacies, though human souls strain after them, hoping to buy such moments as this, do not bring them, rather do they seem to push the yearning desiring spirits asunder.

It is only in moments like this of extreme shock, of joy, of pain, of death, that one soul dashes out of its prison house, freed for one moment, and mingles and fuses with another; one terrible moment of awed delight. Then the escaped soul must go back alone to the human breast that owns it. Its lot is to dwell alone.

But Arese realised he was in the centre of one of those great maelstroms in which the soul gets free; he knew that hers was rushing to his, and he beheld it for that supreme moment in all its dazzling purity and beauty, and knew it was his own.

So drowned was he in all the flood of exquisite emotion and sensation that poured

round him and through him and swept his mental being along with it, that the cramping pain of all his body from lying without moving, escaped him; it was subconscious. All he realised was that whirling, electric waves of delight were circling through him, and that each time her gentle arms pressed his yielding shoulders, he knew a fresh delirium of joy.

Suddenly he heard her say.

“Oh, if I can’t revive him, I’ll die with him. I can’t bear this.”

He felt her little hand press again on his breast. Surely he thought his heart was beating hard enough to tell her the truth. But she did not seem to feel that. Her hand struck against the hard bottle in his breast pocket and she drew it out.

“Prussic acid!” it was just an awed whisper.

Then remembering the lightning deadliness of that bottle, knowing if she but drew the cork it might be the end, Arese broke instantly from those lovely chains which held him.

He shot out an arm, snatched the vial from her, and tossed it down the slope. His eyes

were upon her face, radiant, lovely, with self-revelation as he might never see it again.

“Darling, I am alive!”

He saw the scarlet rush over cheeks and brow, he saw the glorious eyes veiling themselves with white lids, he felt the arms falling from him. He threw both of his round her, crushing the lovely breast together, drawing her down to him irresistibly, and their lips met with an electric shock of exquisite happiness, but in that moment her soul leapt back to its cell, and the gates of mundane existence were put up and barred.

THE RIDE INTO LIFE

BLUE trees, green sky, and red road, what a strange landscape! The kind of landscape which if pictured and hung on the walls of the Academy, maiden ladies, who had never been out of England, would pause before and say to each other, "You know, my dear, it couldn't possibly *be* like that!" And yet here it was in life, in the fact, one of the most beautiful, vivid, and attractive, if bizarre, landscapes that the Divine hand ever created, gorgeous, glowing, dazzling, bathed in the topaz radiance of an Arizona evening.

The one solitary wayfarer coming down the red road on horseback, drew gently rein, and turned in his saddle to gaze on it. He had been riding down the incline from the West, and on the crown of the slope dark firs, their sharp pointed summits jutting into the pure bright emerald green of the sky. No other colour appeared in it, no fleck of cloud stained

the perfect clearness of it. Just that one marvellous tint of luminous transparent green was all over it so that it looked like a hollowed out emerald hung above the earth.

Slowly the man's eyes travelled up the road he had come, that bright red road, like a broad uncreased crimson ribbon, laid down among the blue firs that pressed up to its borders. It was the month of December, and in that month the Arizona fir dresses its little ones in pale sky-blue clothes, giving an eerie look to the hill-sides. The older trees remain their usual dark colour, but all the little firs from a foot high to six or seven feet, put on at this season their suits of fairy blue. And to eyes such as those of the man now gazing on it, the scene in all its strange, still, lonely loveliness carried a profound delight.

He was nearing the tiny Mormon settlement of Fir, buried in the heart of the Tonto Basin, a hundred miles approximately from anywhere; he could already see a few white cottages amongst the trees, and smell the scent of wood fires in the still golden air. The swift

bright sunset would soon be over, and he preferred to enjoy it here on the road alone rather than amongst the settlers. He could enter the village at the fall of dark.

The horse waited motionless with him, statuesque, without restlessness, fully in accord, as always, with his owner's moods.

He was hung all over with useful and varied articles: One could find most things necessary and common to camp life dangling against him, or strapped tightly with small buckskin straps, but one looked in vain for a whip or a spur. Edgar Ashley and his horse Ben were close and constant companions, they talked without words; thought and impulse passed from one to the other without effort, and Edgar would no more have dreamed of striking his horse than a man does of striking his dearest friend.

Ben knew perfectly well now that he had to stand still and admire the landscape while his master did the same, being well accustomed to these halts, especially at sunset when earth and sky seemed to flame round then, and

he was quite content to remain there—though he knew by the camp-fire scent in the air that rest and oats were temptingly near—feeling the serene joy in his master's veins quiver through his own.

Ben was a Turkish horse; a jet black stallion of great size and power. Edgar had acquired him in Constantinople where such horses are common, for the Turk, unjustly abused and misunderstood as he is in England, is in truth the very best breeder and trainer of horses, because one of the kindest-hearted men in the world. Horses in the East are born without vice. This is a well-known fact, and why? Because vice in the horse is only the result of man's inhuman cruelty, and in the East the horse is allowed to maintain the true docility of his nature unimpaired. Whip and spur in the streets of Stamboul are unknown, except where foreigners have introduced them. There is no horse-breaking—hideous word—in Turkey. In countries where man "breaks" horses he has indeed but the broken fragment of a horse. In Turkey one can still see the

horse itself, magnificently strong, intelligent as a woman, docile and sweet tempered. Ben had never been hurt in his life: he had been brought up as a household pet, and all his Turkish ancestors before him also. Of man he had neither hatred nor fear, only love. Love and caresses he had been used to all his life, and he gave back the service of his superb gifts in return.

The glow faded, and the swift soft dusk came down enfolding all the strange barbaric colours in its own even mauve, and the silver sickle of the new moon showed one delicate point above the belt of pine trees in the East.

Edgar turned with a sigh, and let Ben trot through the little brook that broke out from the wood and dance unrestrained across the road at the bottom of the incline, and thus rode into the little Mormon settlement of Fir.

There were things he wanted to buy, so he walked his horse slowly amongst the scattered frame houses, finally pausing before a fairly large substantial dwelling, on the door of which he knocked.

It was opened at once by a man who had that distinctive look that these Western Mormons always have. His large white square face was surmounted by a flat black shovel hat; he was all in black, thin old-looking black, and the frock-coat was buttoned tightly down the middle of his body, which gave the same extraordinary impression of being fat and swelled as the large pale face.

Edgar recognised the look at once, never having seen any Mormon without it, but the man's looks were not bothering him at all then, his ability and willingness to sell stores was the main point.

"Good evening," he said pleasantly. "Can I get some bread, milk, and eggs from you, and most important of all, some oats? I can pay in cash."

"I think we can manage to let you have all those," the man answered, amiably. "Will you come in?"

Edgar dismounted and stepped over the threshold straight into a large square room, the very picture of cleanliness and order. A blaz-

ing fire roared up the great open chimney, its cedar logs crackling under the swinging iron kettle, its warm red light falling cheerily on the boards of the floor which showed a flour-like whiteness.

“Will you tie your horse?”

Edgar laughed. “Oh, no, Ben won’t stir away without me. We’re one, eh, Ben?” he said, slapping gently the satin of the creature’s arching neck. Then he closed the door and followed his host to the fire.

“You’ve a nice place here,” he said, stretching his hands to the blaze. From seventy degrees fahrenheit at noon the temperature sinks rapidly to freezing at dark in the Arizona winter, and this warm interior, full of its rough clean comfort, struck pleasingly his eyes.

“Glad to make you welcome. You’re a stranger in these parts, I guess. Hunting mountain lion for the bounty, perhaps?”

“No. I’m just touring through the country making pictures of it. I’m an artist.”

“Ah, just so,” replied the other with vague politeness, which Edgar knew covered the

other's scepticism. Men only went to the Tonto Basin for two reasons, one of which was hunting the animals on which the State had set a bounty, the other, to escape the law.

Edgar saw that he was in the other's eyes, if not a hunter then probably a fugitive.

"Sit down," the Mormon said, hospitably drawing up a large wooden rocking chair, "and I'll go and see what we have."

He went through an inner door, and Edgar, left alone, rocked in his chair in the firelight and looked about him.

"Whatever faults these Mormons have," he thought to himself, "lack of cleanliness, order, and friendly hospitality is not one of them." While he sat there musing on these strange people and their ways, and on the justice or injustice of their being driven forth from the city they had created at Salt Lake into wilds like these, the door opened again, and he turned, expecting to see the swelled figure and white face of his host. The next instant he had risen, for instead there stood framed in the doorway the form of a girl, and such a dear

charming delightful girl. As she advanced into the glow of the firelight, Edgar could not help thinking she looked like something delicious to eat. Why this occurred to him he could not say, except that where her blue cotton gown turned down at the throat, it revealed a skin of the most exquisite whiteness, and the cheeks had such a pure and lovely rose colour on their firm round outlines. Her hair of burnished chestnut was brushed away from her smooth white forehead, and gleamed with red and golden lights in the glow from the fire. Her dark blue grey eyes looked cool and clear, and added to the impression she gave of exquisite freshness, purity, and health.

In one hand she held a basket, in the other a frothing jug of milk.

“We have half a dozen eggs and this milk, and father is bringing the oats and bread,” she said, setting the basket and jug on the table.

Then she looked up at him, and he down at her, in the red light. Edgar was good-looking, and he knew it, but never until now, under her

soft mild scrutiny, had that knowledge brought him his present glad satisfaction.

“I saw you riding down to our place a little while ago in the sunset,” she said, gazing up at him frankly. “You looked one with your horse, just like a picture I have, look here!”

She ran to the great wooden dresser that filled up nearly all one side of the room, pulled open a drawer, and took out an old and much torn magazine. With swift fingers she turned over the pages till she found the desired one; then laid the book flat on the table and pointed to a full page, well-engraved illustration.

“There!” she said.

Edgar, amused, bent over the picture beside her. She seemed deeply interested in it, almost fascinated. Her little pink forefinger pointed to its title, “The Centaur.” It was a picture full of life and fire. The equine part of the fabled creature certainly resembled the beautiful form of Ben, while the curly head and strong shoulders of the human part, Edgar saw in a glance, bore a strange accidental resem-

blance to his own. In his arms, however, the Centaur of the picture carried a protesting nymph.

Edgar laughed as the girl hung over the magazine; a great curl of her chestnut hair fell forward over her shoulder and almost hid the page. Then she looked up again.

"The girl there is struggling," she remarked, "*but I shouldn't!* I am sealed to Ezra to be his seventh wife: he has six already you know, and I've often hoped someone would come and carry me away. I've looked at that picture every day for months, and then this evening when I saw you riding down the hill it seemed . . ."

She broke off suddenly, giving him a deep penetrating look from her dark blue eyes as if searching him to see if he were ridiculing her. But Edgar was only giving acute attention as his wont was to any new thing presented to him. Her talk was rather bewildering, but he guessed at the thread of it, and she was wonderfully, absorbingly pretty to look at, as

lovely and bright and fresh as a flower that sways in the wind at one's feet.

"It seemed," he took up her words gently, "as if I'd come straight out of the picture to you?"

There was a noise of feet without, voices, and the opening of the door. She had no time to answer. She closed the magazine and slipped it into its drawer, and was putting some hay over the eggs in the basket when her father and some of the other elders came into the room. They all were in the same thin faded black, with puffed looking figures and square white faces beneath flat shovel hats which they took off on entering, displaying smooth lank hair, worn sufficiently long to reach their collars. A stout well-made woman came in with them, who smiled genially at Edgar, and one or two ordinary looking girls. His host came forward with a great bag of oats swinging in one hand, and a roll of fine white bread in the other.

"Our own baking," he remarked, eyeing it

proudly. "Now, Mister, shall I pack these on the horse right now, or will you stay and have supper with us?"

Edgar looked round the room crowded with figures, and the customary quiet of his camp under the stars alone with Ben called to him. The very fact that the girl's great beauty and her mysterious words to him had created a bond between him and her, was another reason why he did not wish to accept hospitality from her father, and possibly the obnoxious Ezra. Which was he of all these men present, he wondered. They all looked exactly alike to him.

"It's very kind of you, but I think I'll go on and make camp," he said, with his pleasant smile. "How much do I owe you?"

The Mormon named a very moderate sum, which Edgar laid on the table. He took the milk and poured it into a calabash slung over his shoulder, picked up the basket of eggs, and with a cheery "Good night and thanks," followed his host through the main door. The girl came after them.

The night reigned now in all its glory; the

intoxicating Arizona night with its splendour of glittering stars, its frosty fine dry air, which seems as one drinks it in, like draughts of chilled champagne, and its essence of manzanita flowers rising all round one, mixed with the scent of the cedar and the pine.

Ben was waiting, patient and docile, and as her father went to tie on him the oats and bread, the girl went to his head and looked straight up into his great lustrous eyes. She stroked him, and then put her cheeks and lips to his satin neck. Edgar watched her, and such was his love for the horse that nothing she could have done would have moved him more. While the Mormon was busy with the oat bag, she managed to murmur to Edgar as they both stood at Ben's head.

"Help me! Save me! I don't want to marry Ezra."

"I will camp close here by the clump of redwoods," was all he could whisper back.

Then he mounted, and Ben shot away like an arrow as Edgar waved his hat and called "Good night" to them. He saw father and

dauhter disappear into the gush of light as the big door swung open and shut. The road led up a slight incline from the spring, and the clump of great redwood firs lay on the right hand, well away from the settlement.

Here Edgar reined in Ben, and dismounting began to strip everything off him, and when this was done, Ben sprang away from him and took a delightful roll on the ground between two great bushes of manzanita flowers; there was no grass to roll on, only the dry, soft, sandy soil, but that did just as well, and after, he was ready for the feed of oats Edgar turned out for him on a gunny sack. A little silver trickle of water ran down beside the redwoods, and here Edgar filled his kettle, and half an hour after his arrival, his simple camp was made, and he sat down to drink his tea and think. Something he felt had boomed down into his easy simply existence when he had first spoken to the girl that evening, something that threatened to wreck and destroy rather than promised to bless.

The cedar logs burned brightly at his feet,

making a clear red gold fire with only a faint blue smoke, which in rising threw out a scent like incense on the air. The night was perfectly still, and walls of velvet darkness stood round him. The flare of the fire showed the huge red trunks of the trees, going up and up it seemed, to infinite heights until far above him spread the roof of their glorious green foliage supported on the red rafters of their boughs. Through the roof here and there, he could see the flash of a tremendous star.

A few cut pine branches with a blanket thrown on them made his bed, and no bed of eiderdown encased in gold could be more sumptuous. The spring of the pine branch is better than any spring ever invented by man. The supple rock of it as one turns or moves cannot be imitated by any bed in the world, nor can any other couch cradle one into such soft slumber.

He rose next morning with the dawn. Dawn in the Tonto Basin! The words are simple, but what a spectacle of grandeur they cover! The sea of pink light that comes swim-

ming through the trees! The straight stems of the pine all lit with sun till they look like pillars of solid gold! The bright clear blue of the morning sky! The scent in the air of resin! The exquisite tracery of frost on all the little trees! The wonderful music of the birds that burst into a chorus of rejoicing! The flight of jays to the brook, that comes down through the pink air, a swooping cloud of blue! Here is a banquet to the senses that the poor groveling house-bound dweller under roofs never enjoys. Civilisation has robbed him of his birth-right, the banquet Nature spreads for us every day at dawn.

Edgar got up from his bed of pine branches feeling every muscle rested by their spring, and his lungs toned up by their fragrance.

He whistled, and Ben came trotting up to him with a joyous whinney, kicking up the golden leaves of the beech and chestnut that strewed the ground, crisp and sun-baked.

Edgar fondled and fed him, and then walked singing to the brook. All his system seemed to sing. He felt so keenly all his health and

youth and strength; life seemed bubbling up to the very brim of his being. He made his cedar log fire and sat down to enjoy his breakfast in the clear sparkling air.

After breakfast he cleared up his camp, thoroughly groomed Ben, had a wash in the brook which he shared with the fluttering, fussing, screaming jays, and then boiled up some water, and hanging a little mirror on a cedar bough, had a careful and successful shave. All this over, he presently sat down on a log by the fire and gazed meditatively towards the Mormon houses which were just visible through the innumerable intervening trees; and a picturesque figure he looked in blue jean, with his high boots, belt round his slim waist, and large sombrero hat shading his dark and handsome face. "Would she come, and when, and what should he do and say?" were the questions tormenting him.

He loved the Tonto Basin, and so far he had roamed about in its hundreds of miles of beauty perfectly happy and without a care. He had never clashed with any of the inhabitants, the

ranchers, few and far between, had traded with him, the hunters, seeing him wandering with his artist's sketch pad, had not resented his presence, and now the Mormons had been friendly. He was free of all the delights of that blessed, peaceful, solitary valley where the sun always blazed, and skies were blue as in Paradise, and he foresaw, if he took this girl, as she evidently wished, the Tonto Basin must for ever be closed to him. If they both escaped the Mormons could not follow them to civilisation since they themselves and their customs were outside the law, but they would continue to live in the Basin, and their vengeance would be upon him if he ever returned. He sighed, he had been so free, so guiltless, harming no one, now somehow this girl had trod straight into his life and brought, as woman always does, difficulties, chains, hostilities, with her.

Of course it was easy to jump on Ben and away for a hundred miles to West or North or South or East. There was no tangible obstacle to that. But even if he did that now, he

felt his free happiness, his lightness and ease of conscience would have departed. His happy camps were gone. If he left her to her fate would not her shadow stand by his camp fire every evening? Would not her dark blue reproachful eyes seem to gaze upon him from everywhere? Yes; there was nothing for it now but to go ahead.

Yet the Mormons had been friendly to him, the unknown stranger, he had eaten of their food, bought, it is true, but still essential to him and supplied by them. To steal away their daughter in return seemed to him unworthy and dishonourable, and yet to give her against her will to one of those hideous bulging old Mormons! That was not right on their part. Perhaps he was justified . . . ?

But he was not happy, and he wished he and Ben had gone on, and that he had never seen the Mormons.

Suddenly, as he sat there, his chin resting on his hands, his shoulders hunched over his ears almost, and his eyes staring gloomily into the heart of the golden cedar wood coals, a

little sound came to him, a pant, a sigh, a step.

He looked up, and she was there in all the glory of her sixteen years, her bright curling hair, her deep blue eyes, and smiling crimson mouth. A fresh pink cotton dress reached just to her ankles, her hair was confined by a pink band. There was a bright pink in her cheek. Coming from behind a manzanita bush, she looked like one of its radiant blossoms taking life and girlhood to itself.

He sprang to his feet; she was so lovely as she looked up at him questioningly, that he obeyed a sudden impulse and lifted her right up in his strong arms off the ground, and kissed her. She laughed, and put her arms round his fine throat and kissed him back, sweetly, innocently.

"Oh, I am so glad to be with you!" she said as he set her down, and they both sat side by side on the log, his arm still round her.

"You are my Centaur, aren't you? You'll take me away?"

Ah, farewell for ever to the Tonto! But his lips were quite firm as he answered:

"Come now, if you like . . . this very minute."

"No, oh no," she answered. "We should be seen and tracked directly. They have good horses all of them, good rifles and pistols, and heaps of friends. What could you do, just one man fighting the whole lot of them?" He saw her exquisite colour fade out, her eyes grow wide at the thought.

"Our only hope," she went on, speaking in a very low tone, though there were only the bright-eyed jays gazing down at them, "is to steal away to-night, very quietly in the dark, and get a long, long way ahead of them before they find we're gone. Don't you think so?"

Edgar nodded. "Perhaps, darling."

"Listen, they all go up to the Chief Elder's house to-night, to a prayer meeting, and I shall be left alone about six, just as it's dark; then I'll come to you here, and if you and Ben are ready, we'll go then . . . ride out to Flagstaff, you know the way?"

"Yes, I know all the Basin; it's about seventy-five miles to Flagstaff, we ought to get

there in the morning." Then he added, drawing her close, "And when we get to Flagstaff, and you are free and among the Gentiles, do you want to stay with me? Or is it only Ezra you want to escape?"

She looked up at him, a beautiful flame of love in her eyes.

"I want to stay with you for ever and ever, and *work* for you all the days of my life."

Edgar threw back his head and laughed. The last proposition sounded so quaint to English ears.

"Sweet one, we'll be married in Flagstaff if we can, and as you say we'll be together for ever and ever, but I don't think we'll have to work very hard, either of us. We'll go all round the world and see everything. Will you like that?"

"Anywhere with you will be heaven."

The jays above were very interested in all this, and screeched loudly at intervals. They were sorry when the two human beings, after much talk and many kisses, rose from the log, and the girl stole softly away alone through the

manzanita. They came down and flew round her, their brilliant blue plumage flashing turquoise in the sunlight. "Edna! Edna!" they seemed crying. "You are going away from us."

Edgar, left alone, stood gazing at the glowing coals at his feet for a time in silence. Then with a sigh, he got his sketching things together, and strolled away on foot into the golden forest. He would leave Ben to rest till the evening. He had much before him.

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Evening came, and with it the soft and sudden dark, and it found Edgar waiting beneath the redwoods, standing by Ben, one arm flung over the saddle. Not a spark of fire or light remained to mark the camp; all his simple necessities were packed most carefully and tightly on the horse. As he galloped, not a thing would move nor rub his glossy skin. Edgar, in years of camping, had learned that wonderful art to pack a horse with weight that he does not feel, and with things that cannot move the fraction of an inch. Now he waited, a fever

of impatience in his veins. Minutes passed and she did not come, and while on this morning there had been hesitation in his mind while he felt sure of her, now when it seemed after all he might lose her, an overwhelming feeling of disappointment, of loss, swept over him.

He grew perfectly mad standing there in the frosty darkness waiting in vain, and felt at last he could go down and storm the house and shoot everyone on sight, set fire to the house if necessary, and smoke all the rats out, do anything in fact, so long as he got her out of it and into his arms again. But he held himself in check as long as he could. She would come no doubt, so many things might have delayed her. But an hour passed since the fall of dark, and she had not appeared.

He decided to reconnoitre on foot, and leading Ben, he slowly and silently passed between the trees towards the back of the Mormon's dwelling.

He prowled round the house in the scented starlit darkness, but there was neither light nor sound from it. It seemed dark, deserted as a

tomb. Then going back a little way from it and standing on tiptoe, craning his whole six feet of height to its utmost, he caught a flicker of light from the roof; a small uncovered skylight in the slope of the tiles at the back made a patch of yellow in the darkness. Silently as a cat, Edgar swung his long limbs up an angle of the house, helped first by the water butt, then by an old walnut tree, till he could scramble on to the roof, to the skylight, and look down. And then he saw all he wanted, more than he wanted. Almost an exclamation broke from him, but he choked it down. There was need of swift noiseless work. She was there alone, tied with her arms behind her to the great main pole that supported in the centre the main beam of the living room roof. Her hat and cloak were thrown on a neighbouring chair. In a flash it occurred to him she had been on the point of leaving the house when she had been caught, and precautions taken against her renewing her attempt. He rapped on the glass skylight. He saw her start and turn her face upward. He saw ter-

ror and delight struggling together in it, as she saw him. In an instant he had wrenched out the little glass casement and his legs were dangling through the hole, his hands clinging to the window ledge.

“To the right, to the right,” she called in a whisper, as she saw his feet swinging, trying to find the cross-beam to rest on. He found it, and from there it was an easy leap to the floor.

“Oh, leave me, if they find you, they’ll kill you,” she whispered as he came up to her.

Edgar had out his great clasp knife, and cut the cords that bound her as she spoke. He put his mouth to her ear.

“Quick! To the door! The horse is there,” he drew her to the main door; it was bolted heavily and locked.

“Not that,” she whispered back, and darted to the small side-door just left on the latch; this led through a sort of scullery. He followed, swift, silent as a shadow. The next instant they had passed out to the serene and starry night.

Ben was waiting. Not a sound did he make. He caught silence as he caught joy or grief from his master. Without a sound Edgar lifted the girl up and put her on his back while he stood without a quiver, then Edgar leapt into the saddle.

“Keep tight hold of my belt, and cling with your knees,” he breathed to her. Then he headed the horse in the direction of the main road to Flagstaff, and leaning forward let the reins fall slack on his neck. This Ben knew was the signal to gallop, and like a shooting star in the heavens, or the sea-lion in his swimming rush, Ben shot from the shadow of the house down the long starlit alley before him between the pines.

Soundless, with flying hoofs and tail borne out a straight black streamer on the wind of his flight, with the two human beings seated on his back, the man erect and easy as always, and the girl clinging desperately with her knees to his sides, her arms round Edgar’s waist, and her whole body bowed down, oppressed by the tremendous speed, the great beast tore on, neck

stretched out, nostrils wide, and elastic limbs flying through the soft dark air. Up one long silent avenue and down another, sometimes arched over by beeches, sometimes flanked by oaks, then by pines, then by oaks again, then maple, cedar, and fir, but on always, on without pause through these lofty silent sentinels, endless line upon line of motionless trees under the flashing light of the stars. At first there was no sound, then far off in the distance, there was a faint whoop in the frosty air.

The girl clung tighter in a perfect agony to Edgar's waist as her quick ear caught it.

"Oh," she breathed, against his spine, "Edgar, they have found out. They've started."

"Don't worry," he returned. "Ben's heard them."

It was the first time they had spoken since the start. The whirl of awful terrified breaking loose, and the wild speed of the gallop literally had taken away power of speech from the girl. And in Edgar's brain there was a tension that left no inclination for words.

Ben had heard that faint, far cry, and he

felt the thoughts of horror that passed through the brains of those he carried. Fast as he was going he was yet only using half his powers, not knowing how long his master would want him to keep up the pace, and holding as his habit was, much strength in reserve.

Now he put on extra steam; they felt the motion of his hind-quarters quicken and strengthen beneath them, the magnificent forward bounds became smoother, more lightning swift.

A storm of those faint, far cries, broke somewhere in the distance; the girl's terrified mental vision could see it all, the whole scene those cries indicated. The Mormons had turned out in a body. They were finding their horses, mounting, hallooing to each other, getting into a band for the pursuit. They all had rifles, would they get within firing range? Would they shoot Edgar? Shoot Ben? Recapture her? Her brain seemed alight and burning. The thought that these two, her rescuers, might be sacrificed through their effort to save her, was so terrible that she felt almost she ought

to slip off and run back to her pursuers, give herself up, and end the chase and danger, but the square white face and the bulging form of Ezra rose before her, and involuntarily her slender arms tightened in a straining clutch round Edgar's lithe, sinewy waist, and she pressed her soft cheek close into the little hollow between his shoulder blades.

The cries grew less behind them, and still the great horse tore on. The wonderful joy of speed got hold of her. Her fears dropped from her as a falling mantle. They would win! No horse could beat this pace, and he, this great, black, glorious beast, was bearing her away to love, to freedom, to a life, to worlds she had not known, would never have known had he not come down the road to Fir that sunlit evening. Now, as the air fled past her, as the smooth rocking motion lifted and lowered her as waves in the sea, she realised she was going forward to the unknown, and the unknown has always a joyous call to youth.

Behind her the settlement in the great forest shut in by the unchanging pines, the hills, the

singing brook, her duties from dawn till dark in that square frame house, the presence and companionship of Ezra till she grew old in serving him. The beauty of the forest of the Tonto Basin was unparalleled, superb, but she would not be allowed to wander amongst its beauties, its forest glades, its golden slopes, she would be mewed in a kitchen, baking, stewing, washing, mending, never with time to go hardly beyond the brook or to the summit of the hill—she knew the existence of the women in Fir.

And now she was being borne away from all that, borne to life. This *was* life itself. She seemed to drink in great draughts of it as they fled down those long silent avenues under the sparkling heavens, and instead of Ezra she clasped this slight and beautiful form full of strength and grace, the mere touch of which filled her with delight. To hear him speak, to see him smile, to feel his eyes upon her seemed to lift her soul away and away to other worlds of ecstasy, and they were going to be together for uncounted periods of time, perhaps for always. Existence spread before her as one

great pulse of tremendous joy. The picture had come true; her lonely gazings on it, her tears, her hopes, her prayers, her wild dreams, her longings, she remembered them all, and they had welded themselves into this.

Suddenly her dream scattered as a shining bubble seems to break into shafts and splinters of coloured light, it broke before reality.

She felt beneath her that sudden redoubled plunging of the hoofs that a galloping horse makes before a leap. She heard a deep in-drawn breath go through the form she held. She looked past Edgar's shoulder, and there, in their very path, she saw one of those huge pits that occur here and there throughout this country. Vast, menacing, devouring, it yawned there waiting for them, easily discernible in the starlight, a great pitch black circle of shadow. They were upon it so suddenly there was no time to change their course or stop. Edgar sat like a statue, not even a finger tightened on the rein; all now depended on Ben, if he had the power to reach the other side of that great gulf or not. His, the de-

cision, the planning how and when to take that awful leap, not one touch, one movement must disturb the working of that great brain that lay within the noble lovely head. The girl, with eyes wide open, strained, and bloodless lips, stared at the chasm. This was death. No animal could leap that abyss.

Ben had smelt the hollow of the pit as they approached. Every fibre, every muscle was preparing for it: as he neared the lip of the gulf, treacherous with bramble and undergrowth, he gathered his legs beneath him, with terrific force struck the loose soil a great pounding blow, and then soared—there is no other word for it—high into the air over the gaping void.

In spite of the terror of the moment there was an amazing joy in it. The girl's heart leapt with the horse, exhilaration, triumph, the pride of conquest—the conquest of boundless spaces, surged up in her, and poured through all her veins. Up, up, Ben seemed to go, for ever flying, then down, and braced as the riders both were for jerk and jolt of his descent, there

was hardly any, he came down on the other side, as a deer does from its flying bounds, seemingly on rubber. They heard the lip of the gulf crumble and give, and the soil and stones fall into it with a roar behind them, but Ben was again in his smooth lightning gallop, half-way down the next long avenue. A sob broke from the girl, of joy, of great elation.

“Are you frightened, darling?”

“No, oh, no, so very happy; Edgar, if I died now I shouldn't care. I felt I knew everything in a thousand lives when he gave that great soaring leap. Wasn't it Heaven?”

“As we got over . . . yes, it was.”

“Did you think he would do it?”

“I couldn't tell. I thought so,” he added after a minute.

“We must rest him soon, he can't go on like this,” and he laid his hand on his neck.

“Ben, Ben, quiet there.”

Almost at once the gallop subsided into the long easy canter which is the horse's natural pace; quickly, easily, in long loping strides, they still sped incredibly fast over the ground.

“Let’s camp here,” Edgar said presently. “We can well stay for a little while. I can’t see how they can catch us up now.”

They had entered a truly glorious camping ground; the forest stood away here. They were descending into a beautiful open valley ringed round by rising hills, a flat round bowl open to the sun, with one of the dashing sparkling streams, an off-shoot from the Tonto River, flowing through it. Their road wound across it, over the stream and up the other side where trees rose again in feathery loveliness against the sky. Here in the valley only a few great cedars stood dotted about, and these not the great dark cedar of Lebanon with its hint of stately gloom, but the smaller more bushy cedar of Arizona, the foliage of which is at this season, a bright golden colour, studded all over with small dark purple berries.

Edgar drew Ben gently to a halt beneath one of these golden trees where the laughing stream dashed by, and there was a plateau of finest pure white sand that looked like the salt in the salt cellars of an English dining-table.

“Darling, darling, welcome home,” he said as he lifted the girl to the ground, and there they stood alone beneath the stars, lighted by the most wondrous lamps, sheltered by the finest cedar roof, sung to by the bewitching voice of running water, canopied round by curtains of soft dark air, and in that mighty number—Two which means a world.

The girl flung her arms round him in rapture.

“Oh, Edgar, I shall die of happiness.”

They kissed there in the solitude. Such kisses as are only given and taken when the mind is roused into supreme elation.

Then they turned to the horse, and he neighed gently as he smelt the water, clear life-giving stream that ran too rapidly to freeze in the coldest night.

For a good half-hour they waited on him, seeing to all his wants, petting and praising him; then when he sank down on the sandy space by the cedar to rest, they turned and threw themselves into each other's arms. Food was nothing to them, nor drink; kisses and

contact and the dear embrace of each other was all they needed. The pressure of his arms round her, the touch of her soft wealth of curling hair all shaken loose long since from its ribbon band, these were enough. They lay locked in each other's arms beneath the cedar boughs on the friendly earth, his cloak thrown over them both, shut into that magic chamber of delight where neither cold, nor fatigue, nor hunger, nor any other ill can come, and to which love alone can give the key.

Orion had wheeled down towards the horizon, a faint quiver of grey seemed to lift the curtain of night in the eastern sky when the girl suddenly awoke. A sense of fear filled her. She could not tell what had roused her. Edgar still slept unconscious. Her first thought was Ben. She looked for him beside them, yes he was there sleeping too, then, ah, what was that dark lump creeping, creeping up nearer Ben? With a feeling it menaced him, the darling one that she loved only second to her lover, she sprang up, she was on her feet. In the dim starlight she saw a sudden gleam of

steel. She rushed forward just as the approaching lump was close to the sleeping horse. There was a smothered scream, an oath, a scrabble on the sand, and then she and Ezra were rolling over and over towards the brook, as she clung with a wild cat's grip to his wrist, the wrist that held the knife with which he meant to kill or ham-string Ben. The horse was on his feet snorting. Edgar had leapt to his feet and seized his rifle, Edna and the Mormon, still wrestling for the knife, had rolled down into the slashing stream. In a second Edgar was on the brink, the girl with the wrested knife had struggled to the other side. Edgar brought his rifle butt down on the man's head just as he was dragging the girl beneath the water. It was only a single blow, but the man's skull gave in; he sank back like a stone, and the next moment the stream had doubled him up, pushed him down, borne him on, and now rushed by laughing. The Tonto is ever laughing.

A drenched, bruised, but triumphant Edna

crossed back to him, holding the long steel knife.

“Oh, Edgar, I saved him. I’m so glad! Think if he’d murdered Ben!”

Edgar looked in dismay at her.

“You will freeze before the morning. Tear off those things, I’ll give you a suit of mine.” He ran to Ben’s pack which lay under the cedar and got out an old suit of jeans, and Edna, laughing and happy, took them from him and passed behind the shelter of the tree.

Edgar went back to the stream and down it a little way, looking for the body of Ezra. He thought he was dead, but he wanted to make sure. A little way down he found it crumpled up and resting against a snag in the stream, the great white face turned upwards to the stars. Oddly enough, the log had caught and stayed him just by where on the bank to a small cedar his horse stood tethered; the horse he had generally mis-used and now ridden almost to death to come up with them in his mad pursuit.

Edgar turned to the animal which was snorting and quivering as he smelt the dead man in the stream. Edgar soothed him with comforting words and set him free. Then he went back to Edna. She looked a queer little figure in his coat many sizes too large for her, over which her hair fell in a great cape, but she was not thinking of herself as she came towards him.

“Oh, Edgar, there may be more of them! Ezra only probably pressed on ahead. We stayed here too long. We ought not to have slept. Let’s get away now as quickly as we can.”

Edgar nodded.

“Quick, get the pack up and your clothes. They’ll dry in the sun. Ben boy, can you do another gallop? We’d best be out of here.”

Ben pricked his ears and gave a little whinney.

Their simple camp was soon struck. Within a few minutes they had mounted, and were away up the opposite slope across the stream that went tumbling and laughing on its way. What were dead men to it? It had

seen many since first in the dawning of the world it had broken loose from its ice chains and become a stream.

Just as Ben got half-way up the slope of the opposite side, a band of Mormons broke into the bowl-like valley. Ezra's riderless horse dashed straight into their midst, and looking across the stream by the strengthening twilight of the dawn, they saw the black flying blot which was Ben ascending the opposite incline.

With oaths and curses they dismounted. They were too late, they knew they could only overtake that wonder horse by the hare and tortoise trick, never in straight riding. The light was bad, but still they would fire into the brown and hope that the pot shot might find its mark.

They knelt, each man raised his rifle, took the best aim he could towards that moving spot, and fired.

A hail of bullets came whistling through the air close by his satin sides, close past his forward pricked ears, one sent up the dust just

by his fore-foot, but all the shots went wide. Ben raced up the slope as his master never let him race up hill before, and with one of his great flying leaps cleared the rim of the valley, went over the crest of the mounting track, and simply bolted over the wide flat plain that lay above. Here were trees, but not dangerously close together. Like an Indian's arrow he sped on, and at the moment when he cleared the crest of the hill, the sun came over the edge, and the whole sky flared up in a radiant glowing pink. Great shafts of red gold light came stabbing through the trees. The branches tossed and swayed in it, and from every side burst a chorus of bird notes, the voice of the forest, a great pæan of triumph, of jubilation with which a thousand little bird throats greet a new day.

And so in the pink on-rush of light, in the frosty gleaming dawn with the birds singing, they drew towards Flagstaff, town of the Gentiles, outpost of civilisation, threshold of the new world she was to see.

“Darling,” Edgar murmured, bending back

towards her, "what a ride you have had, seventy-five miles into Flagstaff."

She laid warm lips on his neck. There was a sombre glory in her eyes.

"Oh, it has been so much more than that, Edgar, it has been a ride into *Life*."

FINIS

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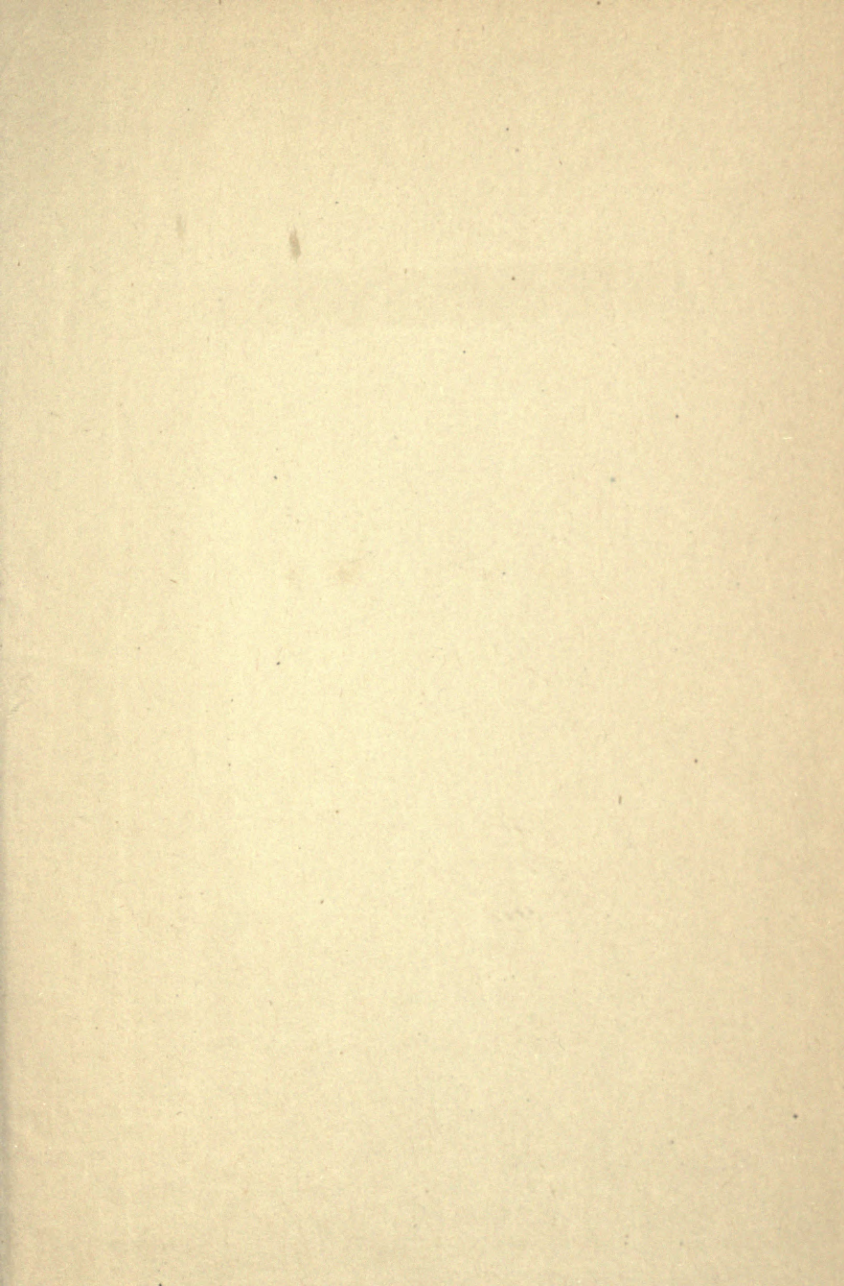
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